

Nothing Like You

orphan_account

Star Wars Prequel Trilogy / Star Wars: The Clone Wars
(2008) - All Media Types / Star Wars - All Media Types

Complete



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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)
[Title Page](#)
[Copyright Information](#)
[Table of Contents](#)
[Summary](#)
[Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10](#)
[Chapter 11](#)
[Chapter 12](#)
[Chapter 13](#)
[Chapter 14](#)
[Chapter 15](#)
[Chapter 16](#)
[Chapter 17](#)
[Chapter 18](#)
[Chapter 19](#)
[Chapter 20](#)
[Chapter 21](#)
[Chapter 22](#)
[Chapter 23](#)
[Chapter 24](#)
[Chapter 25](#)
[Chapter 26](#)
[Chapter 27](#)

Summary

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Description:

Padmé has learned to live life as Emperor Vader's wife, but what if she doesn't have to?

or

When Palpatine realized Anakin would never really turn, he came up with a solution.

Chapter 1

Lava and bright blasts of fire were all that painted the not so scenic landscape, interrupted only by a large black castle that stuck out like a pin pushed up from under the rock. It was a cold, dead piece of architecture, that looked incapable of sustaining any real life, but still much too shiny and new to be a relic.

Despite the assumptions that it gave from a mere glance, life did reside there. Well, it depended what you'd consider alive. Darth Vader was more of a machine than he was a man, and his guards were too brainwashed to have the coherent thoughts that characterized a sentient being. Padmé Amidala had been alive once, but now that was a fact that seemed blurry.

What did it really mean to be alive in a place like Mustafar? In a place like Fortress Vader?

No matter how long Padmé lived and breathed between the dark walls of the complex, she'd never accept it as her home. 'Home is where the heart is' had always seemed too cheesy a phrase to be true, but now, when it seemed like her heart was lifetimes away, she realized it was truer than she'd ever been able to give it credit for.

The room she'd been given five years ago had stayed almost unchanged since she first arrived. It was as cold and dark as the rest of the castle, with the exception of her grand canopy bed and the stacks of gifts Vader had given her. Whenever he came home from a trip he was sure to bring her something, and Padmé thanked him with a smile and a hug he couldn't really feel each time without fail.

Tonight was a night he'd be arriving home from Coruscant. Padmé couldn't help but feel a bit excited, his arrivals were some of the only things she could look forward to. Any positive emotion towards him would've disgusted her only two years prior, but as hopes of escape dwindled, she'd begun to accept her situation, and find joy in whatever she could.

Vader was often away in Coruscant. As emperor, there was much to deal with on the capital planet, but still, he kept Padmé on Mustafar. As much as she hated the rock she was confined to, she preferred it to Coruscant, and never argued with his decision to keep it from her. He'd avoided keeping her on Coruscant and other planets to take advantage of the natural defenses and isolation Mustafar provided, but she appreciated it as it allowed her to stay ignorant to the rest of galaxy. More specifically, to what he was doing to help tear down the republic he used to fight for.

Padmé had made an attempt to keep up with Vader's political moves soon after he'd killed and replaced Palpatine, hoping he'd be different to his predecessor and maybe even allow her to be a consultant, but the news just made her nauseous. When she tried to speak to him about it... well, he made sure she wouldn't again.

That was all far from Padmé's mind now, of course. Forgotten more and more as his vocoder recited his declarations of love, and his cold, heavy arms wrapped around her like a

promise. There was no doubt in her mind Vader loved her, even if he was so different to Anakin.

“I missed you.” Vader’s artificial voice was a low rumble that never matched the sweet words he said to his wife, though Padmé was sure the tone worked very well from his place as emperor.

“You always miss me,” Padmé smiled lightly. His large hands rested on her shoulders, gripping tight enough to leave marks when he lifted them away.

“I suppose that’s true,” Vader let out a sound that couldn’t quite be translated by the machine that amplified his words, a weak chuckle from underneath his mask.

The two sat on a large sofa made of gundark leather. Vader was unable to sink into it the way any normal person would, but he guided Padmé to rest against him. The position wasn’t exactly comfortable for her, but she made no protests.

“What did you bring me?” Padmé inquired. The question made her sound entitled, she knew, but this was their routine. He would bring gifts, and she would be compliant. Then they could both be happy, or, at least as happy as the situation provided.

“A gown,” Vader nodded his head to one of the troopers in the corner, who marched off to retrieve her present at the signal. “From your favorite tailor, of course.”

The tailor Vader referred to had been making her gowns since she was first appointed senator, and it was really the only part of her old life she held on to. Padmé knew it was mostly because Vader liked seeing her in them, but she couldn’t deny that it made her feel a bit more like herself to dress up.

The trooper returned quickly, their steps long and efficient, trained to keep up with the giant strides of Emperor Vader. Still, mishaps happen, and as the trooper stepped toward the couple to deliver the box, they tripped over a stack of her books and fell face first on the floor in front of them.

Padmé moved to get up and help the soldier, but Vader placed his hand on her waist, holding her in place next to him. By the time she could even look back at her husband to ask silently his motive, the trooper had scrambled to their feet again and was handing their master the delivery with trembling hands. The helmet the trooper wore made their expression unreadable, but Padmé could practically feel the fear radiating off of them.

“Forgive me, your majesty,” The trooper apologized before returning to their place by the door. Vader scolded them silently, his eyes shooting daggers from behind the red lenses.

Padmé gulped nervously as she watched the silent exchange. It was obvious what her husband was thinking, planning. The trooper had been part of her personal guard, and though they were never allowed to speak to her, she appreciated a familiar presence. Vader thought Padmé didn’t notice whenever he replaced one of her guards, but she did. She stayed up in bed at night thinking of the sentients he’d killed in her name, and she couldn’t stand another to add to the list. Padmé placed a hand atop Vader’s and directed his attention to her again.

“For you, my love.” Vader said as he placed the box in her lap. It was a large, thin box wrapped in a big red bow. Padmé untied it delicately, and set it aside in hopes he’d let her

keep it. She lift the lid and parted the tissue paper to reveal a fine, red fabric, certainly made of expensive silk.

Vader almost always picked dresses in red or black, a symbol of the great empire of the emperors bride. He didn't protest to her wearing any other color Padmé would choose, but the gesture still dampened her heart a bit. Anakin's favorite color had always been blue, especially when she wore it.

Padmé lifted the dress from the box to get a better look at it. It was anything but modest, with a swooping neckline and slits down the sides, though the neck was high and the sleeves long and bell shaped.

"I adore it," Padmé told Vader, as he was quite obviously waiting for the validation. She laid it next to her for an attendant droid to bring to her closet before wrapping her arms around his neck and leaning into him.

The affection Padmé gave him didn't exactly come naturally to her, but he expected it as it was what she had given to Anakin previously. She couldn't deny it felt wrong to hold and touch Vader the same way she did before he had fallen, but she as much as she'd tried to deny it in the beginning, they were the same man, and deserved the same love. Vader made sure she knew that.

The suit he wore was bulky and unnerving, and he accused Padmé's reservations to be shallow in reasoning, but deep down both of them knew she could care less about that aspect of it all. The truth was Vader was different to Anakin, and no matter how much the Sith tried to convince her that was a positive, she would never truly see it.

Still, their bodies stayed pressed against each other on his command. Slowly, as Vader took her into his arms again and again, Padmé lost the will to be stiff and cold to him. Of course, he stayed unmoving as ever as she melted into him and his emotionless testaments of adoration.

Sometimes, as she drifted off to sleep laying against him, Padmé could faintly hear Anakin's voice in her ear, allowing her to slip into slumber.

"I love you, angel."

The replacement for Padmé's old guard came in the morning, Vader having left her bed after she drifted off to go handle the situation. She cringed at the realization.

There was no use to introducing herself to the new guard, though the two of them were alone together. Padmé knew any trooper assigned to her was much too afraid of Vader to ever speak to her.

She went along with her morning normally, going on to freshen herself in the bathroom before changing into a day dress. The lack of privacy in the room should've made Padmé uncomfortable, but she'd grown used to it, and knew they were much more like droids than they were sentients.

The room was dead silent as ever as Padmé finished getting ready for the day, but she still had quite a bit of time before she'd be called for breakfast with her husband. That was never a

comfortable activity, as it consisted mostly of Vader watching her eat silently between small bits of conversation.

The thought of it made her sigh, and she quickly turned her attention to something knew. Her new personal guard. He was taller than her last, but had the same perfect posture and almost statue like mannerisms as every other trooper. Padmé stepped closer to him, and she swore he stopped breathing.

“I can see you hair,” Padmé warned him, pointing to the dark blonde lock that stuck out from under his helmet. “You should be more careful. My husband has killed men for much less than that.”

“Your husband has quite the temper,” The trooper remarked as he tucked the hair back into his helmet.

Padmé gawked at him. To talk to her at all was a death wish. To insult her husband was a form of a masochism so extreme she could feel bile rising in her throat.

“Don’t say things like that,” She snapped, and stepped away from the guard again to go sit in the velvet lounge chair in the corner of her dark room. Padmé rubbed her temple tiredly. Her new guard would be gone within a week, easily, and she didn’t even know if she could blame herself this time.

Chapter 2

It wasn't long before Vader left again, and Padmé was left to entertain herself in the coffin she called home.

Days like these there wasn't much to do. She was confined to the palace, the only outdoor space being a small greenhouse Vader had built in hopes to cheer her up. The plants she'd picked for it were thriving with help from the droids, but she never felt inclined to see them. It reminded her too much of the past, of Naboo and the things she seemed to have left there.

Every where she went she was followed by her guard, her steps always accompanied by the sound of plastoid against the black linoleum floors. Padmé mostly just wandered around Fortress Vader, only stopping to eat when the droids told her she must. Force feeding was implemented in the droids programming had she refused, so she complied easily.

The new guard made Padmé feel as if she was standing in the center of a large crowd, all eyes on her. He was always watching, focused unlike the other mindless troopers. She knew the uneasy feeling must just be a symptom of the small detour in the strict routine she'd fallen into, but still, it itched at the back of her mind.

When the two went back to her room, she decided she couldn't let it rest. He was the first person other than Vader to speak directly to her in years. Would it really hurt to speak some more, especially when Vader was off-planet?

"Do you enjoy being a stormtrooper?" Padmé poked as she sat on the edge of her bed, taking off her shoes.

The guard stayed silent, she huffed to herself. "Why are you so quiet?"

"Aren't I supposed to be?" The guard retorted, and Padmé laughed.

"Yes, but it's too late for that now," She smiled as she spoke, but the thought was grim and made her shiver.

"I only told you the truth," Padmé bit the inside of her lip. She couldn't deny that, and the trooper new it. What was Darth Vader without his infamous temper? "He's terrible."

"You're gonna get yourself killed talking like that," She scolded him and began to get undressed to get changed into her night wear. Padmé heard the trooper turn around to look away from her. "And I can't agree. He may be..." she paused as she searched for the right word, "...stern, but he's never been anything but pleasant to me."

That wasn't the complete truth, but what did he need to know about their personal life. Maybe if he could keep himself alive for long enough he'd see it and laugh at her for being such a fool. The thought almost made Padmé wish Vader would catch the arrogant trooper, but no, that was an awful though, she'd never truly think that.

"Whatever you say, m'lady," Was all the guard replied. Padmé resisted the urge to roll her eyes. He knew nothing about her, or Vader, or anything. Why was he getting on her nerves?

“They don’t train them like they used to,” She shot back at him, and a small chuckle from underneath the helmet.

“I promise you I’m more than capable,” His tone gave away just how cocky he was, and for a moment she was laughing lightly too.

“Goodnight, m’lady,” The guard said as he watched Padmé climb into bed.

“Goodnight.”

In the morning there was a different guard. It was quite obvious, this new guard was much shorter than the last. Padmé frowned at the sight, but carried on with her morning quickly.

As she brushed her teeth she thought of what could’ve happened. Had Vader set up surveillance in her room? Padmé felt dumb for not considering it. But he’d always promised her otherwise..

The thoughts did her no good, she realized and pushed them away, mindlessly going about the rest of her morning tasks. When Padmé came out of the bathroom, she found her old guard stood at the door again, startling her enough to make a small sound of surprise.

“Did you expect me dead?” He asked with a laugh, and Padmé just glared at him before she began to get dressed. “You can’t get rid of me so easily.”

“Seems so,” She sighed, opening her closet to an array of dresses. She held a manicured nail between her teeth as she decided.

“Try something blue,” The guard chimed. For the first time, he sounded a bit nervous, as if she’d deny him. Padmé only looked at him oddly for a moment before nodding.

“I think you’re right,” She agreed, taking out a simple blue dress that had a sparkling bodice dotted with expensive gems.

Padmé slipped on the dress easily and then slid into a pair of comfortable flats. “How do I look?”

The trooper tilted to his head to the side as if he was thinking about it. “Stunning.”

Padmé smiled shyly at the man. It’d been so long since anyone but Vader complimented her. All the mofts who tried early in his reign had been slaughtered in a possessive rage. No one ever tried it again. Except her new guard, of course.

“What’s the occasion for such a gown?” The guards question pulled her from her unwanted thoughts, and she grinned.

“Reading on my lounge.” Padmé decided, taking a seat and picking up a book from the stack next to her.

The next week or so went by much of the same. Padmé and her guard had a simple back and forth as she went through her average routine. It made all the boring things she did a little

more interesting.

After a few days of it, he took to relaxing in the lounge in her corner while they talked. Sometimes, he'd even sit next to her. It was thrilling to have someone so close, even if they were clad in the same plastoid that served as a barrier between Padmé and every other sentient on the planet.

Their talking was confined to her room, away from the rest of the loose lipped staff. They never discussed anything of importance, only banter and the latest book Padmé was reading, or hobby she'd taken up. She knew nothing about him, besides the fact that he was a dead man walking.

He was still a critic of her husband. So much so Padmé began to wonder if Vader had sent him to trick her into confessing she hated him or something ridiculous like that. She never agreed with the things he said, only rolled her eyes or argued in favor of Vader.

"He's my husband," Padmé repeated for what felt like the hundredth time.

"You used to be a senator," The guard pressed. "You're too smart to be so blind."

"I love him." She said finally, and after that, he was quiet.

Finally, after over a month of solitude, Vader commed to tell his wife he'd be arriving home in just a few hours.

With the news, Padmé jumped to change into the gown he'd gifted her his last visit home, knowing he'd be disappointed to see her in anything else. She felt the same near happy feeling she felt every time he came back. It was something to do besides the same old thing, though she supposed the last month hasn't been too boring with her guard.

The floor clacked under the sound of her heels, and she took a small glance over to him. What would happen to him now that Vader was home?

"Help me with this?" Padmé requested, holding turning her back to the guard so he could see the zipper she needed his assistance with. He stepped over to her and closer to dress easily.

The gown sparkled just a bit in the light, and Padmé couldn't help but feel exposed with the way the neckline plunged between her breasts.

"How does it look?" She asked with a bit of a shake in her voice.

"Anything looks gorgeous on you," He said, and she grinned, feeling more reassured with it.

The guard followed Padmé into the lounge where she was to meet her husband. He was quiet for what felt like the first time since he'd been assigned to her, and the ex senator found herself thanking the force for that. Maybe he did have some sort of sense to him.

The lounge was as dark as the rest of the palace, but it was fairly designed. There was some level of comfort in the velvet couches and the fireplace that felt ironic considering their location, but it was hard to appreciate when Padmé had already associated the room with bad memories. She'd dreaded waiting there for him when she first arrived at the palace.

Those first meetings still haunted her. Vader would call Padmé in from her rooms whenever he pleased, his presence always so terrifying and unforgiving. He'd ask again and again about the children, first calmly as his attitude allowed, but progressively more violent. Most of their encounters ended with her face red and stinging, tears streaming down her face as he made sure she didn't look away from him, his hand on her throat with a grip that would certainly leave a bruise.

"How could you let them die?"

It didn't take long before Padmé broke. It was her fault, she'd killed their children. And now she would spend the rest of her life making it up to her husband.

She wrapped her arms around her stomach instinctively as she sat on the familiar dark couch. It was only a few moments before Vader arrived, his breathing make it unnecessary for Padmé to even look up to know he'd entered. She stood to greet him, hugging his broad figure as best she could, his helmet poking at the top of her head.

"How was your trip?" Padmé started as he began to pull her out of the room. She was thankful for the change of location, but couldn't help but feel as if he were dragging her out. Was she in trouble?

"Fine." Vader's answer was cut and flat, and she gulped at the tone. He clearly wasn't pleased. Padmé glanced back at her guard, but he'd blended into her husband's brigade. At least they weren't alone. Not that the troopers had ever held him back from doing what he pleased before.

"Is something wrong?" She dared to question him, and Vader stopped in his place, his red lenses glaring down at her. Padmé bit her tongue to stifle a shiver.

"Do you know what they say about you out there?" His voice boomed, and Padmé flinched. Vader knew the answer, he knew how isolated she was. "What they say about us?"

Padmé shook her head frantically, and his grip on her arm only grew tighter. Vader continued to pull her down the hall. She knew she should be used to this behavior, it wasn't usual for him, but it always shocked her. He could be so like Anakin sometimes that she almost forgot, but Vader was different to the man he'd once been, and he'd make sure his wife knew it. Anakin was weak, Darth Vader was his everything he wasn't. He was better.

"Tell me, do you love me?" Vader didn't even look at her as he spoke, but his attention was strictly on her.

"I love you," Padmé promised, her voice firm. She wasn't lying, and she just hoped he saw that. Vader scoffed at her answer, he pushed her into her own room, and suddenly her stomach dropped inside her.

"Are you sure you don't just love him?" Vader picked up a holo from her bedside table. The moving image showed Anakin and Padmé, on their wedding, long before he became the man he was now.

Padmé couldn't answer, not truthfully. She couldn't tell him what she really felt. That she hoped somewhere deep in that dark husk of a man, was her husband, her real husband. She couldn't say that. But it was almost as if Vader had heard her anyway.

With a violent movement, the holo went crashing onto the floor, breaking into a million little pieces. Padmé watched as the picture disappeared from the glass, but didn't make a noise.

Chapter 3

Padmé didn't let herself cry until Vader had left her room. Her sobs filled up the air, breaking the silence like a cut with a dull knife. She was alone with her guard once again, but he was quiet. That only made her tears run faster.

She bent down to try and collect the pieces on the floor, but it bloodied her hands. Behind her there was shuffling. Suddenly, a soft touch appeared on Padmé's shoulders.

"Don't do that, you'll hurt yourself," The guard told her, but Padmé only shook her head and continued with her painful task. This was the punishment she deserved. How awful was she? She couldn't even tell her husband she loved him. The trooper behind her must think her weak, selfish, and ungrateful. He must wonder why Vader didn't kill her yet. She knew she did.

"Stop, Padmé, please," The guard requested again, but she ignored him. His hands pulled her away from the scene and she made a noise of protest but was too weak to resist. "I'll pick them up for you, I have gloves."

Padmé let him do it, watching from over his shoulder as he gathered the pieces and placed them into a small dish she'd emptied and given to him. When he finished, he placed the dish where the holo used to sit on the nightstand.

"Let's fix this up." The trooper led Padmé to the bathroom with a gentle hand on the small of her back, and let her sit on the sink. He took some bandages out from the cupboard and began to wrap her hands up.

"Is my dress torn?" She worried out loud, scanning her gown for any tears. The guard shook his head. "He'd be mad." Padmé explained, though he probably already knew that.

"That's better," he said as he finished bandaging her wounds and helped her hop off the sink.

"Thank you," Padmé said quietly, stumbling as she stood again and falling into him, making his armor clank around. He laughed weakly, and she looked up at him with narrow eyes. His helmet made it impossible to know what was going on with him when he wasn't talking, and Padmé found herself slipping her hands under it. She was tired of expressionless men.

"Maybe you should lay down," He suggested, his voice cracking a bit. She seemed far away from his words though, as she felt a soft head of hair underneath, and tangled her fingers in it. He placed a hand on her forearm and lowered her hand gently before she could go any further. Padmé flushed from embarrassment.

"I forget myself," She apologized, and walked out into her room, too disoriented to do so without her arm looped with his. Padmé couldn't look back at him again, not when she could never be sure if they were making eye contact or not.

"It's not a problem, m'lady," The guard watched as Padmé crawled into bed and turned away from him. "I live to serve you."

"You live to serve my husband," Padmé corrected. Nothing was hers, it was all her husbands. Everything she had now was Vader's, even her own being.

"No, I'm loyal to you," The trooper pushed again, and she could hear him step closer to the edge of the bed. If it hadn't been covered by the thick armor, she's sure he would've felt his body heat, his breath, something to indicate he was alive.

Holding her breath, Padmé reached out blindly, hoping he would understand. He did, it seemed, as he took her delicate fingers into his own covered ones. If Vader saw this, he'd be slaughtered and she'd be tortured. Tortured worse than she ever had before. But she couldn't stop herself. The gesture was much too comforting to allow common sense to get in the way.

Padmé fell asleep with her hand laced together with her strange guard's.

Sometime in the night, Vader had come into her room to apologize. Padmé woke up with his stiff and intruding presence poking into her back. Thankfully, her guard had returned to his normal place soon after she'd drifted off and well before her husband had shown up.

Sleeping next to Vader had never been exactly easy for Padmé, but there was something comforting about his large, strong presence. She couldn't deny she felt safe in his arms, she always had. Vader's grip was almost claustrophobic, but it wasn't a totally unwelcome feeling.

Padmé didn't dare move from his arms, and instead did her best to settle into them until he woke her up. When her eyes fluttered open momentarily, her trooper took almost immediate notice, nodding quieter than she thought possible in such armor. She felt almost embarrassed that he saw her this way, surrendering completely to her husbands hold. Padmé shut her eyes tightly again. It didn't matter what he thought, she reminded herself. The only person who should matter to her was Vader, above herself, even.

It wasn't uncommon for her to feel exposed next to Vader. He was so covered, it wouldn't be surprising to find out he wasn't even human. As sheltered as Padmé was, she knew of that rumor. Next to an artificial man followed by faceless, mindless troopers, it felt almost whorish to show any skin. Padmé knew her husband could sense the discomfort, but still, as if it was a punishment, all the gowns she was gifted were uncharacteristically revealing. She couldn't help but think that Anakin would rather strip the clothes off his own back than see her uncomfortable. But maybe that was one of the flaws Vader was always talking about.

Finally, Vader woke her with a large hand against her cheek. The sight of his large, threatening helmet always made her realize just how much she missed his kisses. Padmé still smiled at him, letting him feel her lips with the artificial nerve endings placed on the pads of his gloves. He often touched her in this way, something that she knew must look weird to any onlooker. It wasn't a perversion of his, at least she didn't think it was, it seemed to be more of a curiosity. Padmé knew her husband missed their intimacy, but he'd found his own unusual remedies.

“Good morning, my love,” Vader greeted her, his voice void of sleepiness she knew her’s was certain to possess. To be fair, she wasn’t quite sure he even slept, or had the ability to.

“Thank you for staying with me,” Padmé spoke quietly, a contrast to his booming voice. His hands stayed firm on her sides, gloved fingers brushing against her bare skin. The familiar feeling still sent small shivers through her. Padmé placed her own hands atop his. “Breakfast?” She interrupted him.

Vader’s head titled slightly up towards her, and for a moment she feared his next words. Padmé hadn’t protested his advancements in quite a long time. Luckily, he didn’t question her. “Of course.”

Breakfast was as silent an event as ever. There were few sounds that filled the castle then; her fork clinking against the plate, the droids rolling around as they served the couple, and of course, Vader’s heavy, artificial breathing.

Padmé couldn’t think properly in the space. It was deafening silence as much as it was an overwhelming one. She wondered how she managed to keep down the meals she was fed here, as the nerves climbed up her throat like stomach acid.

Her guard served as some what of a comforting presence. Padmé wasn’t exactly sure what about him calmed her, especially when he could barely be differentiated from the rest of Vader’s troops, but just knowing he was in the room eased her, if only a bit.

“I’d like you to prepare for a public appearance,” Vader’s announcement interrupted her meal abruptly. Padmé dropped her fork to her plate in a very unladylike fashion, gaping at him. In the five years she’d been at the palace, she hadn’t had to appear in front of the public once. Everyone knew of her, of course, but she was almost as elusive as her husband. What had compelled a once successful and notoriously single senator to marry the dark lord that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere? The general consensus was that she’d been forced to.

“Why?” Padmé asked dumbly. She could conjure up the answer if she thought about it for more than a moment, but she was still processing the shock.

“You’re well liked, darling,” Vader explained in an almost mockingly sweet voice. “The people miss you, worry about you.” He paused and his fingers tapped against the table. “They worry about what goes on here, between us.”

She nodded, taking a small sip of water to avoid speaking. Padmé could understand the concern. Even the portrait that had been painted to celebrate Vader’s coronation raised questions. His hands placed firmly on her shoulders, looming over her more like a prison guard than a loving husband.

“When will this appearance be?” Padmé put on the steady face she’d learn to keep as queen all those years ago. Skills like that had kept her alive the last few years.

“In a standard week,” Padmé’s face dropped. “I don’t wanna overwhelm you, my love, we’ll only be in the Imperial Center for two nights.” Coruscant? She could feel her stomach shredding itself already. She dreaded that place, especially with its new title.

“Shall I prepare some words?” She couldn’t imagine she’d be allowed such a freedom, but she poked at the idea. Vader seemed to consider it for a moment, and hope flared up in her chest.

“That may be too much for you, don’t you think?” He thought her weak, beaten down. It was his doing, and some part of her worried he took joy in the knowledge. Anakin had always been so proud of her strength, but Vader saw it as defiance. “I’ll have an attendant write up a small speech for you. Mostly I just need you to stand there and look pretty. Happy. That’s not too hard now, is it?”

“No, of course. I can do that,” Padmé grinned as if to prove it to him, and Vader nodded. “Anything for you, my husband.”

Chapter 4

The detachment from her old life only made itself so obviously clear occasionally, but something about the little realizations hit Padmé like a blaster shot down her throat.

Staring at her closet, she realized this trip would be one of them. When she'd first come to Mustafar, she'd been a wildly different person. Hope still fluttered in her chest, strength still kept her feet firmly on the ground, and her babies still grew safely within her womb. But then it was all ripped from her, ripped out in a bloody mess like someone had taken her heart.

When the twins died, Padmé died, and her corpse had been rotting on Mustafar ever since.

Now she was expected to leave for Coruscant, and it wasn't as if she could refuse. No, she'd have to swallow her reservations and do as she was told, do what was best in the moment, as she always had always would.

Truthfully, she was almost thankful for the trip. Padmé had felt she was betraying her people by abandoning them the way she had, and maybe this was the first step towards helping them again. That thought put a small smile on her face at least, even if it did mean facing the worst of her husbands crimes.

She realized she didn't have much to wear fit for the Emperors consort. All the the gowns that fit the description dated back to her time as a senator. Padmé sighed as she picked the older dresses from her wardrobe and handed them to the droid that would be loading her belongings onto the ship. The little thing beeped and scurried out of her room. That was the last of the things she needed.

The door closed behind the droid with a small click, and looking up, Padmé saw it was her guard that had shut it.

"Is that all you'll be needing, m'lady?" He asked her, and she nodded, gathering her skirts to sit on the edge of her bed. She rubbed a hand over her face, a migraine was beginning to knot itself behind her eyes.

"The shuttle doesn't leave for an hour or so, come sit with me." Padmé patted next to her, and her trooper hesitated before taking the seat. She could hear him sigh shakily under the helmet, though he did his best to hide it. She placed a hand over his thigh, worried. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing, m'lady," He assured as he rested his hand atop hers. The movement was inappropriate, but it felt natural. Touching him felt right. "I just worry for you."

"You'll be there to protect me," Padmé smiled. "You've never failed at that before." Over the last month, she felt as if she began to see a friend in this man, even if she knew practically nothing about him.

"That may be so," Her guard agreed as he clasped his hand with hers smoothly. 'But if I were you I'd be terrified right now.' Padmé furrowed her eyebrows, and her trooper shook his

head. "Not that you should be, just..." he sighed, looking for the words. "You're much stronger than me. Than anyone I've ever known."

Padmé cast her eyes away from the black lenses that hid his own. She didn't feel strong, she hadn't in ages.

"I'm not so sure of that," She laughed lightly, enjoying the feeling of his gloved fingertips rubbing the palm of her hand. His gloves were different to Vader's, so thin she could almost feel the skin underneath. The thought of that contact made her ache.

"You doubt yourself too much, m'lady," Her trooper was adamant in his tone, as if it was an urgent matter. "You shouldn't listen to him, he's a poisoned man. An evil one."

Padmé snatched her hand away from her guard. "I thought you'd moved past saying things of that sort."

"I refuse to lie to you," The guard moved one hand to cup her jaw, the other being placed on her waist firmly. Padmé's breath hitched in her throat. He was so close, touching her places only her husband and the emdee droid had been permitted to for so long. It was so simple, yet so intoxicating.

"I love you." He whispered, so low Padmé almost didn't catch it.

"It's almost time to go," She got up from her seat without a reply to his confession, and started down the hall. The sound of his boots on the floor followed behind her only moments later.

The bright streaks of stars that formed in hyperspace always made her dizzy to look at. Padmé sat next to Vader as she avoided looking at the windows, and instead focusing on the way he held her hand in his.

It was so different to the way the guard had done so, and yet it felt more foreign. Almost ten years of marriage and a strangers touch felt more familiar than her husbands? Padmé was sure she was losing her mind.

Who even was this guard anyway? Her only friend in years? Yes, but even more so someone who was distracting her from her purpose. Something in her was tempted to tell Vader about the mans transgressions. She imagined how pleased he'd be with her, how she'd finally prove she really loved him.

But it wouldn't last, it never did. No matter how hard Padmé tried to please her husband, to better her situation, it was never a permanent fix. If she got the trooper caught, she'd only be left to grieve him and wallow in guilt and sorrow, even if it was amongst stacks of the material validation Vader loved to provide.

"You look gorgeous, my love," Vader pulled her away from her contemplation. He was fidgeting with the end of her sleeve, his other hand on the back of her neck in an almost obnoxious display of possession. Still, she would've enjoyed the gesture if her nerves hadn't been eating at her.

“Thank you,” Padmé lifted her lips into a formal grin, and took his gloved hand to her lips to give him a gentle kiss on the knuckles. “I will admit it was fairly difficult to find something appropriate for the event.”

“I should’ve considered that,” he admitted, “As much as I enjoy your usual gowns, it’s only right that my consort have the option of modesty, especially in the eyes of the public.” He ran a hand down the exposed part of her shoulder and chest, brushing past her cleavage. Padmé wasn’t quite sure if he was inspecting her dress or her body, but either way felt exposed among the other men on the ship. Besides the troopers she was used to, there were unmasked admirals and moffs, who did their best to keep their eyes off the imperial couple as her husband began to reach further.

She could feel her face was bright red from the embarrassment, and silently begged him to stop. This behavior was typical for him, and really not too extreme of an encounter, but in front of all these people, it made her feel like a whore.

He slipped his hand beneath the neckline of her dress, and Padmé found herself holding her breath and shutting her eyes. Maybe she could pass out to avoid the embarrassment. How could Vader even attempted to convince her that her appearance was needed to settle unwanted talk? Rumors would fly now with the way he acted; even the loyalist of his officers couldn’t help a bit of gossip.

Maybe she was overthinking it, but how he grabbed her in even her most modest of gowns made her doubt how much he really cared about public image. No, Darth Vader only cared about one thing; power. Power over his enemies, power over his galaxy, power over his own wife.

Thankfully, Vader had been nice enough to allow Padmé her own quarters at the imperial palace. They’d been prepared for her for quite some time, he told her, he was just waiting for the right time to show her.

The rooms were gorgeous, even more stunning than the ones she’d had in Theed when she was queen. The walls were a deep red, decorated with gold framed portraits and tables so vintage they almost looked as if they belonged in a museum rather than a home.

Padmé sighed, she’d collapsed into the large bed as soon as she was left alone in the room. Alone besides her guard, of course, but she tried to pay him no mind for the moment being.

They’d been greeted with the press when their shuttle from the flagship landed, the holonets best reporters buzzing to catch a glimpse of the emperors consort. Padmé couldn’t be mad at them, they were only doing their jobs, she supposed, but she still dreaded it.

Her eyes still burned from the flashing, and she rubbed her palms over them with a groan.

“Do you need me to fetch the med droid?” Her guard spoke up from the corner of the room, and she glared at him. “You’ve had a headache since we left Mustafar.”

“No, no,” Padmé shook her head, but winced at the sudden movement. “I just need to sleep it off.”

The guard stepped over to the edge of the bed and looked at her worn out figure before sighing. Carefully, he unlatched the small pieces that kept together the gloved part of his armor.

Padmé didn't recognize the sensation at first, but when her eyes fluttered open to register the foreign object pressing against her forehead, she let out a small noise of surprise. The guard chuckled. The back of his pale hand was against her forehead, taking her temperature in the same way her mother had when she was a child.

"You're a bit warm," He decided, but didn't move his hand from her face quite yet. Padmé was quick to grab it before he even got the chance, forgetting the stabbing feeling in her head.

"Don't put the glove back just yet," She practically begged, and his helmet gave a slight, hesitant nod.

With their fingers laced together, Padmé took the moment to explore every part of the mans hand. His palms and finger tips were rough with callouses, as if he'd been a farmer or some other kind of worker, but the top of his hand was smooth and young. She knew she could spend hours, days even exploring his hand. The little scars gained from forgotten stories, and even better, the ones he'd be able to tell her all about. Padmé knew, just by his hand, just by its feel, that the man who served as her guard was gorgeous. He could look like a hutt under his helmet and she wouldn't change her mind. He was the most handsome man she'd ever met.

She bit her lip at the thought. Maybe it was awful of her to think such things, when her husband couldn't be more than a fifty meters away. But she couldn't exactly help it. Padmé loved Anakin with all her heart, but the guard before her made her feel like she was on Naboo with him again.

"I love you too," Padmé confessed to the guard, though her voice shook with the fear of the wrath of her husband.

"You don't to be afraid of him, angel," Her guard lifted his hand to her chin, reading her mind. The nickname made her stomach erupt in butterflies.

She wasn't quite sure her trooper knew what he was saying, but she couldn't bring herself to care in the moment. For the first time in years, Padmé was in love. She giggled to herself at the thought. It was ridiculous, but it was true.

"Kiss me," Padmé requested, and the trooper hesitated in a moment of shock.

"Can you promise not to look at me?" The guard seemed nervous, and so Padmé agreed with a nod. She couldn't quite understand the motive, if there was anyone who wouldn't judge looks it was her. She'd never had a problem with Vader's deformities, and she could never quite understand why she would. Anakin had been attractive before he fell, but she was never shallow enough to marry him on that alone. Still, she complied to the guards request, shutting her eyes tight.

The helmet came off with a small click, and Padmé could hear the slight fluttering sound of him shaking his hair around. He must have fairly long hair, she thought, especially seeing as it stuck out of his helmet on their first encounter. She wondered what it would be like to run her fingers through it.

The guard set his helmet besides her on the bed, and even lifted his hand to cover her eyes as an extra precaution. Padmé laughed slightly at this, though not because she thought his worries were silly.

“What’s so funny?” His voice was so different with the helmet removed, and she let out a small gasp. His lips were much closer to hers than she’d imagined, and his words breathed against her in a way that made goosebumps rise on her arms. She knew it was just a trick of her infatuated mind, but her heart lurched with the feeling of familiarity.

“I was just thinking,” Padmé felt her lips brush against his as she spoke, so lightly she barely noticed. “I can’t see where your lips are.”

“You can feel them,” he said, even closer now, so he was practically speaking into her mouth.

With the slightest lean forward, they finally made contact. The kiss wasn’t one of desire, nor was it one of hesitation and inexperience. It was slow and deep and curious, like two past life lovers had finally met again. Padmé’s hands crept up into his hair, feeling the thick locks run through her fingers like sun warmed sand in the lake country. She didn’t tug at it as she might’ve in a more heated moment, only appreciated the soft feeling she’d craved for so, so long.

Though she felt guilty, Padmé really couldn’t help but imagine Anakin in that moment. Anakin, not Vader, the Jedi knight with dark gold hair and friendly blue eyes and the biggest heart she’d ever known. Her husband, not her captor.

The guard broke away from the kiss momentarily, allowing Padmé to suck in a deep breath of air she hadn’t known she needed. He only continued to leave kisses along her jaw and neck, like he’d starve if his lips were forced to part with her skin.

“I’ve missed you, angel,” He whispered against her neck, and she sighed happily, petting his head as encouragement for him to continue. The feeling of his bare skin against hers made her feel warm deep in the pit of her stomach, almost like the bubbly feeling one had after two many glasses of Alderaanian wine.

His armor was clunky, and she found herself wishing she could get him out of it, but didn’t say a thing. She could care less if she was left with bruises from the hard plasteel, as long as he stayed close to her. Padmé grabbed at what she could imagine was his waist, pulling him down to lay with her. He complied easily, moving to hover over her. There was no sexual intent behind it; only the hope he’d allow her to fall asleep in his arms.

Chapter 5

A new gown had shown up at the end of Padmé's bed the next morning. Apparently, dressmakers across the Imperial Center had jumped at the idea of making a dress for the emperor's consort, especially one that would be worn on her first ever public appearance since the rise of the empire.

The gown she wore was completely black, and it would've looked more like a mourning widows dress than the imperial bride's if it wasn't for the large, sparkling crystals that hung obnoxiously from the bodice.

It was a bit of a struggle to get the garment on, in all honesty, but with a bit of careful tugging and a lot of help from the attendant droids, she managed to fit into the thing. Padmé went to take a look in the mirror, but frowned at the way the crystals made noise as she walked.

"For what it's worth, I think you look beautiful," Her guard spoke up from the corner after the droids left the room.

"You say that about every gown I wear," Padmé laughed as she turned to look back at him, though the movement was futile with his expressionless helmet and almost statue like disposition.

"Well, it's always true," He shrugged, his armor making a clacking sound as he moved.

Though she'd ran over the speech Vader had given her what felt like a thousand times already, she still repeated it in her head. It was a bland speech really, one crafted to invoke pride in the empire her husband had forged. Padmé had done her best to be proud of his accomplishments over the last few years, but deep down she couldn't genuinely support it. Still, she'd deliver it with the most passion she could muster.

There was a loud, startling knock at the door that Padmé wasn't even given enough time to answer before her husband walked in. He was too tall for the door, and forced to bend down to enter.

"You look stunning, my love," Vader approached Padmé with long strides, and rested one hand firmly on her shoulder, while the other reached for the diamond necklace that laid heavily between her breasts. "How do you feel about the gown I've chosen for you?"

"It's gorgeous," Padmé wasn't exactly lying, it was truly a work of art; she just wasn't quite sure if it belonged on a person or in an exhibit.

"Good." Vader placed a hand on her back and led her out of the room in one quick, forceful movement that made her stomach flip. Behind her, she heard her guard following close.

“Don’t be nervous.” Padmé watched as Vader prepared to step out to the balcony where he’d be addressing the crowd. His words felt more like a command than a reassurance, but she smiled at the effort all the same. His large hand held her to his side, and she took a deep breath, taking comfort in his protection.

“Are you ready?” He asked, but before she could answer, they were stepping out to face the people.

There had to be at least a thousand sentients who’d gathered to see them in person, plus a few hundred troopers who stood in front of them, keeping the order. The majority of the people were reporters and their crew, but Padmé couldn’t quite make out the people far in the back, the sun reflecting off the skyscrapers blinded her just a bit.

“May I present,” An unknown voice boomed across the crowds, “Emperor Vader and his consort, Lady Padmé Amidala.”

The crowd cheered at her presence, but she couldn’t ignore the hushed whispers and buzzing voices of reporters as she stepped onto the balcony.

Vader didn’t speak, he never did, his political presence was not a charming one. He left that to his wife, even in the years where she was locked away, the promise of her support had taken a large part in keeping the empire strong. At times, holo clips would be digitally edited to show she really did back the empire, but Vader didn’t feel the need to let her know that.

“I’d like to thank you all for coming today,” Padmé stepped in front of her husband to speak into the microphone that had been placed before her. Vader kept his hands supportively on her shoulders. ‘I know I’ve been missed here at the Imperial Center, and I hope you can all forgive that. I cannot possibly express the pride I have in my position by my husband’s side,’ She briefly looked back at her husband to grin at him, something the holonet reporters were sure to pick up on. “Before me, I see the citizens of this grand Empire, these sentients who form the bonds that keep us strong! And under my husbands leadership, you have all thrived.” Padmé did her best to ignore as a protestor was dragged away by a trooper, the scene taking place in the corner of her eye. They didn’t know what was best for them, obviously, if they thought they could stand against Vader’s forces.

“This Empire has risen from the ashes of the Republic,” her voice was clear and steady for the majority of the speech, but she could feel the nerves bubbling in her throat. “And we will continue to rise! Long live the Empire!”

The crowd roared as she finished, but she could only smile for a moment before she felt herself begin to feel faint. Padmé fell back against Vader a bit, who’s tight grip kept her upright. With his hands still on her shoulders, she was pushed back in the palace, and the doors were shut behind her.

“Are you alright?” Vader asked, his voice laced with genuine concern. She nodded lightly, but the movement sent stabbing pain through her head, and she stumbled into a chair behind her.

The people outside were still shouting behind her, and Padmé felt as if they were slowly coming closer. She knew it was impossible, the troopers would never allow it, but still, the feeling of closing in, the feeling of being trapped, made her airways tighten and her heart race.

Vader's figure looking down on her was not helping. He may of been trying to assist her obviously bad state, but he was the very thing causing it. He was a symbol of the Empire first, and a man second. That was what Palpatine had set out to create, and he'd accomplished it in the most horrifically stunning way. He'd created a monster.

Padmé couldn't run from it anymore, her husband was as evil as all the rumors she'd been told to ignore claimed he were.

Before she knew it, Vader had gathered her into his arms, and began to carry her to her rooms. Any other day, she would've been thanking him, leaning into his touch, but now, the fire he'd beaten out of her so many years ago saw a new ember. She kicked and fought as best she could to get away from his grasp, even despite her weak and disoriented state.

"What are you doing?" Vader wasn't too effected by her attempts at defiance, but he'd much rather avoid the conflict.

When the two finally arrived at her bedroom, Padmé was practically thrown onto the bed. Faintly, she heard a random trooper ask if an Emdee droid would be needed, but tuned out before she could hear what become of him. Vader had made an honest attempt to not kill anyone in front of her, but she still knew it happened, and sometimes slip ups were made. She was only thankful her guard wasn't stupid enough to ask such questions.

"Go away," Padmé groaned quietly, partly because she couldn't bring herself to be any louder, but also because her fear didn't allow for her to raise her voice anymore. Vader stared down at her in a silence, but his presence made his ideas clear.

"I know you're not in your right mind at this moment, my love," He stepped toward her and reached out to stroke her hair, but she turned away from his grasp. He made a deep, displeasured sound at her disobedience, and forcefully grabbed her chin to keep her head in place, looking at him.

Padmé kicked at his side, and though he wasn't physically affected, she had clearly struck a nerve.

"I will not tolerate misbehavior simply because you are ill," Vader tightened his grip, surely leaving bruises in the places where her trooper had kissed not even a day prior. She couldn't help it as her mind wandered away from the situation at hand, and back to the things she felt with him.

Suddenly, Vader's hand fell from her face. The room felt so still Padmé began to wonder if he'd somehow froze time, but before she could speak, Vader was grabbing the back of her neck and pulling her to an upright position, using his other hand to keep her head where he wanted it. Padmé felt like a dummy on a ventriloquists hand with the way they were positioned, and he was directing her to scan the room of troopers before her. About a dozen of them in total.

"Which one?" Vader's voice was low and steady. Padmé wanted to be confused by the question.

"What do you mean?" She stuttered out, her eyes desperately glancing around the room, so fast it made her dizzy. Her guard was amongst the men, standing towards the edge, slightly

separated from the rest of the troopers. Somewhere within, she found the self control to not let her gaze linger on him.

“Which of my men has been running through your fantasies, darling?” Padmé’s breath caught in her throat, and she silently cursed herself for her own stupidity. A few of the troopers shifted uncomfortably, but fell back to their default stiffness as Vader’s helmet snapped towards the sound.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said in the steadiest voice she could muster, but her words still shook under her anxiety.

“Let me give you a reminder,” Vader’s fingertips brushed past her lips, dipping into her mouth just enough to leave the taste of leather on her tongue. “He kissed you here...” His hand trailed lower, down her jaw and neck, “And here...” Without even a moment of hesitation, he ripped off her sleeve to expose her shoulder. “Here too...”

Padmé reached up to keep her breasts from falling out of her newly ripped dress.

“Did he kiss you there too?” She shook her head no, but his hands still reached toward her. He took a cruel pleasure in this kind of thing, she knew. “Are you ready to tell me? Or do you need another push?”

“No, please, no,” Padmé begged, doing her best to wriggle away from his grasp, but to no avail. “I’ll tell you.” Vader waited expectantly, and Padmé found her eyes searching the room. Finally, they landed on a trooper in the corner, one that took the overnight shift while her guard slept. She’d never spoken to him, and only caught glances of him. Nausea built in her throat as she realized the fate she’d doomed him too.

“I see,” Vader finally let go of his wife, and strutted over to the trooper he’d followed his wife’s gaze too. He was one of the tallest of the group, but looked meek in comparison to Vader’s daunting height. The Emperor ripped off his helmet to reveal a young man with carved features and short blonde hair. He couldn’t have been more than nineteen.

“You have a type,” Vader scoffed, and Padmé screeched as her husband snapped the trooper’s neck with one simple movement. “That’s better.”

Vader had begun to walk out before the body even hit the floor, and Padmé could only sob, watching as the corpse of the man she’d killed was carried out by his peers.

Chapter 6

Padmé couldn't quite register as Vader's troops followed behind him leaving her alone with only her guard. She could faintly hear as a higher commander gave him orders, telling him he'd have to take the night shift temporarily and to lock her doors before she slept. Vader would be the only one with a key.

It wasn't long before she felt arms around her, bringing her in to a tight, protective hug.

"It's okay," her guard whispered into her hair, pressing a kiss against her head in an attempt to reassure her. "We're both okay now."

"I'm sorry," Padmé choked out the apology into his neck, where her head rested. He was warm. Even after five years on Mustafar, this kind of warm shocked her.

"It's not your fault," he promised. Padmé shook her head, and felt as his hair brushed against her neck. He'd taken his helmet off, she realized. She hesitated for a moment, not sure what she should do. Should she ask to see him? Or just go for it?

She shut her eyes tightly, grabbed at his face, and crashed her lips into his. At first, he didn't move, shocked, but it was barely a moment before he was kissing her back, moving his hands into her hair and tugging at it if only by accident.

Slowly, Padmé found herself opening her eyes, moving back away from him so there foreheads were still pressed together. She was staring into sparkling, blue eyes. She kissed at him again with a dazed smile.

"You're not mad?" He mumbled against her lips, and she laughed.

"Why would I be mad?" Padmé sighed as she moved away from him, drinking in his full face. Her features furrowed together as she stared at him.

Blue eyes, and dark blonde hair, and that stupid kriffing face that had plagued her dreams for years. She scrambled off the bed and away from him, as far away as she possibly could. It took everything in her not to scream.

He wasn't Anakin; he couldn't be, not when Anakin was five doors down living in a coffin. But he looked like Anakin, so much so the urge to vomit had begun to tickle the inside of her throat. The man approached her, holding out his hands in front of him as if to show he was harmless. The gesture wasn't working.

"Get away from me!" Padmé hissed at him, trying to shrink back into the wall as best she could, but she'd only backed herself into a corner. Luckily, he stopped where he stood.

"Let me explain," The fake Anakin started, taking a deep breath. She only looked at him with wild eyes, like a caged animal. "Angel, please, it's me."

"Don't call me that." She knew there had to be a rational explanation for this. There was technology that could change faces, but what was the point? Was Vader trying to torture her? Was it the rebels she'd been warned about?

“Who do you work for?” Padmé demanded, doing her best to sound steady. “I’m not a fool, you know, this trick won’t work on me.”

He stepped towards her, and she could feel herself begin to tremble. He took her hands into his gently, and looked down at her with a pleading expression.

“I don’t work for anyone,” He said in a voice that made Padmé desperately want to believe him. “I’m Anakin Skywalker.”

“Liar,” Her husband was long gone, but in case this man was a spy of Vader, she kept that thought to herself. “He was killed by my husband. And we’re all better for it.”

The fake Anakin cast his eyes away from hers, and for a moment she almost felt sorry. “I know you too well for you to try and lie to me.”

Padmé couldn’t believe his audacity. To push her so far, to make her think she loved him, to play dress up as her dead husband. She knew people could be sick, she’d seen it firsthand, but even the cruelest of mercenaries would never have pushed it to these levels.

She placed her hands on his chest, pushing him all the way to the opposite wall, where the door was. As his back slammed against the wall, Padmé looked up to see the all too familiar face smirking down at her, making her painfully aware of the gown that was still ripped enough to expose her chest.

With one swift movement that was aided by his distraction, the door flung open. Out into the hall, she shrieked as loud as she could.

“Help, guards, help!” Padmé screamed, and a look of terror fell over the fake Anakin’s face. Before she could see his fate, she pushed him into the hall and shut the door behind her. She silently prayed Vader wouldn’t make her watch this time.

A new guard showed up only a half an hour later, but by then Padmé was already in bed, doing her best to sleep.

It wasn’t easy, knowing what she’d done. That wasn’t Anakin, it was impossible that it was, but seeing her husband die again would be too much. Vader could be merciful, she knew, and she hoped he’d spare her feelings just this once. At the very least, take whatever device the man had used for his disguise, so that she could watch a stranger die instead.

Padmé knew she’d miss the kisses he gave her, even if they were fake. It was still affection, and she’d craved that kind of touch from someone for so long. Especially from Anakin. She’d begged her husband to let her into his meditation chamber with him, just so she could see something real again, but he’d always refused. Vader told her she’d only be disgusted by it, but she disagreed. Padmé could never be disgusted by her husband, not when he was Anakin deep down under the layers of plasteel and leather and dark side magic.

When she finally did sleep, though, it wasn’t long lasting. It couldn’t of been more than an hour before she was awoken by the sound of heavy footsteps. Curse her light sleeping.

Vader could be the only one who’d enter so late, she knew, so Padmé just rested her eyes again. A hand slapped over her mouth, and she resisted the urge to scream as she felt

something wet press against her lips. It wasn't Vader's familiar leather gloves. Her eyes shot open, but in the dark she could only make out a blurry figure.

Padmé kicked at the intruder, trying to scream and bite, but it was no use. Something in her began to lull her into a deep state of sleep that made her legs too heavy to kick and her mind too tired to speak. She could faintly recognize the sensation as she was lifted from her bed, and then, it went completely black.

Chapter 7

Padmé imagined that she'd wake up tied to a chair, under a bright light, in a damp cold cellar. Whether it was the rebels or Vader who'd taken her, either option was quite likely. An imperial whore, or a cheating slut? It didn't matter, they both ended in the same place. A room with no windows and a man with no mercy.

It was a shock when she opened her eyes to nothing of the sort. She woke up on a bed, under thick covers and in new, unripped clothing. Large windows let in the sunlight, but her neck ached too much to turn and see the view. The room was silent, except for a droids that zoomed around, beeping furiously. She never learned binary, though Anakin had always promised to teach her.

When Padmé tried to get up from her place, she found her ankles had been restrained. She sighed in defeat and closed her eyes again. Maybe if she could drift off, she'd wake up next to Vader on Mustafar...

“Mistress Padmé?” A familiar, posh voice rung out besides her ear, causing her to give a small jolt that hurt due to the restraints. Standing over her was a familiar gold droid. “Oh, I’m sure you don’t remember me—”

“Threepio,” Padmé breathed. She'd thought her attendant droid had been destroyed. That was what Vader had told her, at least. “Of course I remember you.”

Threepio seemed pleased with the news, and started rambling off about how he'd missed her. He wasn't of much use in helping her understand anything that was happening, though.

“Excuse me, but where am I?” She asked politely, though her heart was just about to jump out of her chest.

“Oh forgive my manners,” Threepio apologized with a dramatic wave of his hands. “You are on the rebel base on Hoth, under the care of the medical droids.”

Padmé could've had a stroke. A rebel base, that could very well be a worse fate than what she could've imagined. At least a hundred rebels around her, all of them wanting her dead, no doubt.

“I need to get out of here,” She pleaded, trying to move out from under the restraints with no success.

“I’m afraid that’s not possible,” This time, Threepio was not the one speaking. Instead, a man approached her. Though he had a few more gray streaks, and his smile lines had become more prominent, Padmé recognized him all the same.

“Hello, my dear,” Obi Wan greeted her in his characteristically calm voice, taking one of her hands into his. She could only stare at him as if she were seeing a ghost. Well, she was; Vader had killed him.

“What’s happening?” Padmé’s voice was weak and shaken, and she could feel tears prick at her eyes. The panic began to well up in her again, and a voice in the back of her mind told her to run. Back to Vader, back to Mustafar, back to safety.

Obi Wan looked down at her with a sad expression. She could sense his pity quite clearly, and, even if it was genuine, it made her feel like a joke. Padmé didn’t need his pity, she needed him out of her head.

“Vader will come for me,” Padmé hoped it came off as the threat she was intending. “He’ll come for me and he’ll slaughter you all.”

“We don’t want to hurt you,” He promised her, squeezing her hand in an attempt to comfort her. ‘Anakin wanted to come see you, but I thought that may of overwhelmed you again.’ Obi Wan explained, his eyes traveling from her to the door, where the small window showed someone peaking in. They quickly ducked again when they were caught. “Everyone here just wants to see you safe.”

“You’re lying,” Padmé refused to give into him. “Vader told me about the rebels and their tricks, but he must’ve not thought you sick enough to pretend to be my dead husband. You’ll kill me as soon as I give up the information you want, he told me.”

“And he’s never lied to you?” Obi Wan countered easily. She tried to reply, but faltered, leaving her sitting with her mouth open, looking like an idiot. “You have friends here, friends you’ve known for ages and friends who are dying to meet you for the first time.”

His wording peaked her interest, but she didn’t let him see it. Padmé had always guessed her friends would’ve joined the rebels, they were quite near to doing so before Anakin even turned, but the confirmation made her wonder. She’d been so sheltered from the outside world, she had almost no clue what the rebels were like besides Vader’s vague descriptions of them.

“Let Anakin explain himself before you jump to conclusions, dear,” Obi Wan requested of her, a genuine look painting his face. Padmé nodded. Maybe Vader was right and the rebels were awful, but putting up a fit against everything they did wouldn’t help her either way. It was in her best interest to comply, she decided, at least for the time being.

Obi Wan had given her an hour to prepare before Anakin arrived to see her, most of which involved eating a proper meal and being freed of her upper restraints. Her ankles were still held down to prevent escape, but she appreciated the ability to move.

Anakin entered the room exactly on the hour mark, as if he’d been waiting outside the door. Padmé still doubted the mans identity, but she also saw no use in arguing against him.

Her husband wore the same dark jedi robes he always had, and approached her in the same way as well, reaching in to give her a hug before hesitating and deciding against it. He was so unchanged Padmé began to doubt he authenticity again, but upon closer inspection, there were a few differences.

New scars marked his face, though they only enhanced the rugged handsomeness he’d always possessed. His hair had been trimmed only slightly since the day previous, a change

that seemed intentional to prove his identity. The technology used to change faces did not allow for minor changes like that.

“Padmé, angel,” Anakin smiled at her though there were tears in his eyes. He rested his hand besides hers, but didn’t touch her just yet. ‘I’m sorry if we frightened you.’ He apologized, looking down in shame momentarily, before returning with a serious expression. “I couldn’t bare to see him hurt you anymore.”

“I’m okay now,” Padmé let her fingers brush against her knuckles. The movement made his grin grow just a bit.

Her gaze dropped to the white, glossy tiles that made up the floor before she spoke again. “But I was okay before, too.”

“No, you weren’t,” Anakin didn’t let it be anymore than a statement. He said it as fact, and Padmé knew convincing him to let her go back was out of the question. Maybe even if he was a fake Anakin, the moments they shared when he acted as her guard were real. Could that be possible? She could only hope.

“You say that you’re Anakin Skywalker,” Padmé began to change the subject, ‘But I don’t understand how that’s possible. My husband..’ his expression changed drastically when she used that term, and so she corrected herself, “Emperor Vader, he was Anakin before he became a Sith.”

Anakin shook his thoughts, not disagreeing, but more so clearing his thoughts.

“Maybe I should explain first,” Anakin sighed, biting his lip from nervousness. His expression turned dark, and though it was only a bit, it made Padmé shift uncomfortably. He began to explain.

Anakin had really, really wanted to listen to Master Windu. He respected the man and his judgement, even despite their many, many disagreements. So, when Mace told him to stay, he was completely intent on listening to him.

But, the force overruled everyone, even Master Yoda, and the force was telling him to follow Master Windu to Palpatine.

Anakin had been the one to uncover the chancellors treachery, and it was really only fair he’d get to help arrest him, anyway. So he hopped in a speeder and broke every traffic law in the book to get there. It wasn’t as if reckless driving was new to him, and it cut the travel time in half.

His gut lurched as he hopped out of the vehicle and ran towards Palpatines office. Something was not right here, not right at all. Not only was the dark side growing stronger and stronger as he approached, but there was an unnatural sense of something lurking behind the chancellor’s doors.

“Don’t listen to him, Anakin!” Mace sounded distressed, and the buzzing of electricity run through the halls.

When Anakin finally entered, he was greeted first by the corpses of five Jedi masters lying on the floor, and then by the horrifying scene of Sidious blasting Master Windu with strong waves of force lightning.

Finally, though, and truly the most terrifying of it all. He saw himself, cackling along with Palpatine as he drove his blade through the Jedi and watched him fall to his death.

“Anakin,” Palpatine croaked from his place on the floor, as both the dark lord and his double turned their attention to him with wicked smiles. “How nice of you to join us.”

“What is this?” Anakin gestured to his mirror image with ignited lightsaber. He was a perfect replica of himself, but the dark side of the force radiated off of him like a sickness.

“Your clone,” Sidious said, as if it was obvious. ‘The improved version of you,’ The two laughed at that one, but Anakin could only snarl at the ghastly duo. “Lord Vader.”

Vader dipped his head to Anakin in a simple greeting, and they circled around each other, waiting for the other attack.

“Lord Vader,” The old Sith croaked out, ‘This is your final test. The power, the control, and his prize will all be yours in his death.’ Anakin’s mind raced. His prize? What could he possibly have that would be worth anything to a Sith. This clone already had his power in the force, presumably, what more could he want? “Kill him, and claim your rightful place next to me.”

“It will be my pleasure, master,” Vader smiled darkly as he lunged at Anakin, igniting a fiery, red blade that clashed with his own blue one.

“You’re very confident for a knock-off version of me,” Anakin couldn’t help but tease his opponent as he took an ambition swing at his head. The Jedi was quick to duck out of his way, leading the red blade to crash against the wall behind them.

“I will kill you,” Vader growled, pulling his blade from it’s stuck place with a violent tug.

“Don’t be so sure.” Anakin backed the other man towards the exposed window where Master Mindu had fallen, hoping to cause him to falter. Vader was impressive with a lightsaber, though, and blocked everyone of his shots expertly, as if he knew what Anakin was going to do before he did it.

“When I kill you,” Vader began, taking great pleasure in running a cut through Anakin’s bicep. “Your senator will be mine.”

Anakin pushed his blade against Vader’s, their feet slipping on the edge of the window. The fresh Sith had no idea what he was talking about; His wife, his Padmé would never be anyone but his. He wouldn’t let her fall into the hands of this creep, he just couldn’t. It was bad enough she was forced to keep their marriage a secret, but to doom her to a lifetime with a monster was something he could not afford.

With a swift movement, Vader had stepped from in front of him, to behind him, and suddenly Anakin was the one staring two hundred stories down.

“You should be happy,” Vader laughed as his blade made a cut deep enough to hit bone in Anakin’s thigh. “If you really love her, you’d want her to be with someone stronger than you, wouldn’t you.”

As a last stitch effort, Anakin spit in Vader's face. That only led the Sith to raise his blade to Anakin's throat, but before he could even think about it, Anakin was falling. Not to the dark, but to his death.

Chapter 8

If there was one place Anakin could expect to wake up after being nearly killed by his own clone, it was Alderaan.

As soon as he woke up, an attendee droid told another droid, and then that droid told another droid, and so on and so on, until the room was beeping with droids. It really sucked knowing binary sometimes. Finally, though, Bail and Breha Organa came in.

The two explained how they'd heard rumors of Anakin's fall to the dark side, but when they'd found him lying, half dead in Coruscants underbelly, they called Obi Wan before anything else. It'd turned out that the Jedi had already had his suspicions, and, knowing the couple was one of the only people he could trust after the rise of the empire, sent Anakin to stay with them.

"Wow, I must've been out a long time," Anakin assumed, but the couple only looked between each other with worried glances. Suddenly, he became very aware of a few urgent issues. "Where's Padmé?"

"It's only been a week," Breha laughed weakly, though the matter didn't seem funny at all to her. "And Padmé, she.." The Queen's eyes couldn't quite keep contact with his anymore.

"Padmé was taken," Bail cut straight to it, something Anakin had usually appreciated, but at the moment he'd almost prefer Breha's sensitivity.

"What about our child?" His next question was almost expected, because the two perked up almost instantly.

"They're both here," Breha grinned, and Anakin looked at her, confused.

"Both?" He asked stupidly, his voice almost silent.

"There were twins," Bail explained. The couple seemed so happy at the idea of the children, it almost brightened Anakin's mood as well. "Luke and Leia; Padmé named them before... well, before Darth Vader took her."

"So he did get her then?" Anakin felt useless. He was useless. All he'd wanted was to protect his wife and she still managed to fall from his grasp.

"I've got to go find her, now."

It turned out it wasn't so easy to just go and save Padmé from the doom she was facing. By the time Anakin awoke from his coma, she'd already been announced as Vader's fiancée. A month after that, the two were married in private.

Meanwhile, the med droids had the fatal responsibility of telling Anakin he'd shattered most of bones, and would be partially paralyzed for at least a couple months. They would have to reinforce most of the damage with steel and artificial joints. Then, he'd have to relearn everything with his new cybernetics.

When he was finally well enough to even begin thinking about rescuing his wife, it had been a year. And then, there were the twins to think of. Obi Wan and Ahsoka had been doing their best to protect them, but everyone knew Anakin was the best one to shield their force signature. Not only was he their father, but the man who posed the most danger to them was an identical copy of himself.

He'd be lying if he said he hated the time he spent waiting to save his wife. It was torture, thinking about Padmé trapped with that monster, but their babies made his days more than bearable.

Anakin loved being a father more than he ever could've imagined. Even with all the trouble they caused, he wouldn't trade a second of time with them. Their connection in the force was the strongest Obi Wan had ever seen, between each other and their father. So much so, that his absence could shake the force around them enough for even the weakest in the force to feel.

For their safety and his own, he knew he would only be able to save their mother when they were old enough to understand his need to part with them. By their fifth birthday, Luke and Leia were much more aware of the force, more than Anakin even knew babies could be capable of. In part it was thanks to their connection, the way they felt and fed off their fathers distress and joy.

Leaving them had still been hard, though. He wasn't sure how long it would take, and the rebellion had been reluctant to even let him go on the solo mission. Most were convinced he was the key to bringing down the empire, but he had always been skeptical of his prophecy.

"How long will you be gone?" Luke asked his father for what felt like the hundredth time.

"I don't know," Anakin answered honestly. He'd squatted to the floor to let the two give him a proper hug before he left, but it had been quite a while now and they hadn't detached their arms from around his neck. Their worry was obvious, and he did his very best to soothe it.

"We want you to stay," Leia echoed her brothers sentiment, pouting in the way that would've gotten an immediate yes out of her father any other time.

"I'll bring Mommy back with me, though," He promised, which seemed to lighten to their moods a bit. They may have never met their mother, but Anakin was sure they would know her. Every day they saw photos of her, holos of her, he even read them the journal she'd kept during her pregnancy as a bedtime story.

Explaining the exact predicament to them had been complicated. Breha had suggested early on, that if Anakin intended on explaining where their mother was, it'd be best to do it through the lens of a fairytale. So, to the twins, their mother had been locked away in a tower by an evil dragon. Anakin didn't suppose it was too far off, though, and he did happen to be a knight. Or, as much as a knight as he could be, considering the dissolving of the order and his already unorthodox lifestyle.

It had turned out to take two months to even get into contact with Padmé, and another with her before it was safe to leave.

The Empire's standards for troops were pretty low, at least to Anakin, who was used to brutal training, and so he quickly rose up the ranks. With only a bit of force manipulation,

he'd been assigned to Padmé's personal guard, and from there, it was only a matter of waiting for the right time to run away with her.

The most difficult part of it all was watching his wife suffer. She thought that he was whatever sick creature lived under the mask, that, and the way Vader treated her made his blood boil.

Anakin watched night after night as the imposter that lived under his name claimed possession of his wife. It wasn't as if he wasn't possessive himself, he was and he'd happily show it to any fool who he thought worthy of a reminder, but he never thought he truly owned her. Vader truly treated Padmé like an object, like something he could control. The Sith thought everything was his, and everything that wasn't could be; no, would be. It made Anakin's gut stir uncomfortably.

Kissing her again had been like kissing her for the first time. Of course, she'd been his first kiss, his only kiss, but he was certain there was no one who could compare to her in that area.

"I've missed you, angel," He'd let the nickname slip when they broke apart. Of course, she didn't know who he was, but maybe, just maybe, her subconscious would pick up on it. It was the most he could hope for.

Anakin hadn't quite expected the reaction he recurred when he finally revealed himself to her. Obi Wan had warned him that it was likely she'd respond in that way, but he'd brushed it off. How could she be upset? He was her husband.

Pain shot through him when she snapped at him. Padmé had always had a hold on him, and so her unhappiness hit a hundred times harder.

It wasn't as if she actually had endangered him pushing into the hall; stormtroopers were infamously easy to force trick. Still, he realized he couldn't wait another second to get her out of there. Especially since it would be much easier to flee Coruscant than it would Mustafar.

Vader had manipulated her much more than even he could have imagined. She actually thought she loved him... the idea made Anakin red in the face. He would bring her home, he had to.

Chapter 9

Padmé took a deep breath as he finished his story. Anakin couldn't quite place her reaction, but she looked as if she was going to begin hyperventilating.

"Are you okay?" He asked, reaching out to grab her hand. She didn't back away from the movement, surprisingly, but actually held onto his in return.

"I'm sorry." She'd begun crying now, but thankfully her breath had steadied. Anakin reached out to wipe her tears away, and she grabbed his other hand, pressed a firm kiss to the side of it. 'I—I don't know if I can except all of it,' he frowned, but let her continue before speaking on it, "But, I do know you're my husband. My Anakin."

He smiled at her, leaning down to kiss the top of her head. "That's all I could hope you'd say."

"The children," She didn't want to waste anytime, obviously, as she looked up to him with wide, hopeful eyes. "They're alive?"

Admittedly, Anakin hadn't really thought about what she knew of the children before he arrived in Mustafar. They'd all assumed she knew Vader wasn't Anakin, that he'd kidnapped her from the from the understaffed medcenter, and that her babies had survived. They thought the Sith would use the information as the perfect leverage and torture. When he got there though, he realized the situation was much different to what he'd expected. Vader had told her they'd been stillborn, and that it was her fault. She was too weak.

"They're safe, angel. Obi Wan shielded them from his detection when he came for you," He assured her with a grin she couldn't help but return. "They're here too, you can see them as soon as you're ready."

"And they know about me?" Anakin nodded, and she frowned. "You didn't show them any of the videos of me that he put out, did you?"

"No, of course not," The propaganda Vader had used her face and voice for hadn't seemed like the best content for them. 'But I did show them holos of you at the senate, and us on Naboo.' She perked up at that, and he continued. "You may not know them, but they know you. They adore you."

"I'm glad," She said honestly, though she didn't seem totally convinced. "I must seem like a villain in those videos. I'm surprised the rebellion even lets you keep me here."

"Everyone here loves you," He assured her with a shake of his head. The truth was the rebellion was more than happy to have Padmé back. The Empire had used her image far more than she was aware of, and her condemnation of it would spark the fire they'd been nurturing for all these fears. Those closer to her worried though, she still needed to recover, and no one was sure how long that would take.

"Maybe, I just.." She shut swallowed nervously and tried to look away from him, not sure of his reaction. "Everything I did with him, I did willingly. Doesn't that make me complicit?"

An enemy of the people?"

"He was awful to you," Anakin sounded as if he was about to gag thinking of the man, anger rising behind his eyes in a very unjedi-like way. He didn't care what she said, nothing between them was consensual, not when she was being manipulated and lied to at every turn. "He stole you away from me..."

He'd always been possessive, but when Vader began to speak like Anakin did now, it never ended well. Anakin's jealousy was always easily tamed, but Vader's seemed to be insatiable. Padmé shrunk away from him at the thought. She knew they were different, but how much so?

Anakin's gaze shifted to her, and he tilted his head, confused for only a moment before it seemed to click. "I don't mean it like that, you know."

She nodded, and he did his best not to be hurt. He knew it would take time, even her accepting him as her husband was a huge step forward so early on, but he couldn't help but be disappointed. All he wanted was to hold her, kiss her, touch her the same way he had before this whole mess.

"I'm not like him," he assured a little more forcefully, but still she gave no verbal reply. He sighed and looked for a change of subject. "Will you wanna see the children soon?"

"Oh, yes, please," Padmé clasped her hands around his, a genuine excitement to her words lifted his spirits.

The twins' room was modestly sized, filled with makeshift toys Anakin had crafted out of defect parts the rebellion could spare. He'd taken to making them for all the children at the base, but there weren't many. The few children who did reside there spent most of their time with one and other anyway, away from the commotion, so toys always found themselves in the same location.

The room was attached to their fathers, a set up Anakin appreciated more than he'd admit, and one that was necessary due to limited space. His bedroom was much smaller than theirs, but he had never really noticed, being used to the cramped quarters of the Jedi temple.

"Luke, Leia," he called for them as he stepped inside, doing his best to avoid stepping on some toys they'd left out.

"Daddy!" They squealed happily, quickly attaching themselves to either of his legs.

"If you do that, I can't go take you to see your Mommy, now can I?" He chuckled and the children let go at an instant. Leia reached up to hold his finger as they walked, her other hand holding Luke's.

It was a short walk to the med-center, a choice that seemed intentional given Anakin's more than often visits to it. Before they entered her room, he took a deep breath, and laughed when he saw the children mirror him.

"Padmé?" He peaked into the room to see his wife, her head tilted nervously at him. She'd cleaned up with the help of Threepio, and was glowing despite the day's events.

She didn't say much, just watched intently as the children hid behind him, anxious to meet their mother. She noted how they clung to Anakin and to one another.

"Hi there," Padmé spoke softly, reaching a hand out. Surprisingly, it was Luke, not Leia, who grabbed it, pulling himself away from his sister. "What's your name?"

"Luke," He said, then, to be clear; "Luke Skywalker."

She smiled at him, and then to her husband, who beamed back at her. Padmé hadn't remembered naming the twins when they were born, but she recalled the names she had on her list of potential options; Luke if it was a boy, and Leia if it was a girl.

Leia moved towards her next, grabbing at another one of her fingers.

"I'm Leia," she said with a firm voice.

Padmé was absolutely floored at the pair of them. Really, they looked like mini versions of Anakin and herself, but much cuter. Still, the boy had some of her softer features and the girl had some of her fathers sharper ones. She couldn't help but giggle at them.

"Your father did a good job with you two, didn't he?" Anakin grinned proudly as the two nodded, and he placed his large hand on top of the other three, covering them completely.

"They're excited to meet you," he told her, pressing kisses to the top of the twins heads before stage-whispering, "They're just shy."

"I'm not shy!" Leia protested, scrunching her face at her father. "Luke is, though."

Luke hummed, nodding, "Yeah."

Their parents laughed at that, and the twins easily forgot their anger and sheepishness, respectively, and joined in with them, though they weren't quite sure what was so funny.

They spent the rest of the day in the med-center, the twins doing most of the talking as their mother began to learn about them. It made Padmé's heart ache to think of how much she missed, but she was also ecstatic that she was here now. Her babies were alive, with her! How could she not be happy?

Hours flew past much too quickly, and soon enough the children were yawning. They protested Anakin bringing them to bed, but after Luke had fallen asleep and Leia's eyes were half shut, he carried them back to their room and tucked them in.

"Hey," He said softly as he stepped back into Padmé's room, taking a seat at the large cushion chair next to her bed.

"Hi," She put down the book she'd been given and rubbed her eyes. "When do you think I'll be let out of here?"

"Whenever you want," He told her with a shrug. "They only wanted to do a checkup, now it's just up to your comfort."

"Maybe tomorrow then?" She hated the med-center, it reminded her too much of the months directly after Anakin's fall — or Vader's rise.

“Sure,” he agreed, but rubbed at the back of his neck with an obvious anxiety.

“Is something wrong?”

“No it’s just,” he sighed, casting his eyes away from hers. “You’ll have to share my room, there isn’t much space anywhere else on the base.”

“Oh,” Padmé hadn’t really thought of that, it shouldn’t be a problem though, right? He was her husband. “That’s fine, I’d still want to move out of here, if that alright with you?”

“Of course,” Anakin smiled, “I’d rather be closer to you anyway.”

The two were quiet then for a long time. The chair he’d sat in was pushed up against her bed, and so he laid his arm next to hers, entangling their fingers. She didn’t protest it, or say much anything about it, but every now and then she’d fidget with his fingers. They drifted off like this, and woke up the same.

Chapter 10

“I don’t think you understand the sensitivity of the situation!” Anakin whisper-yelled to a very obviously frustrated Mon Mothma. Luke was sleeping, clinging to him like a kowakian monkey-lizard; he’d been having nightmares and couldn’t sleep without his father near him.

“We can’t sit back and wait any longer,” she replied calmly, her arms crossed over her chest. “I care about her too, you know, she’s my friend.” Anakin rolled his eyes with a scoff. If Mon cared about Padmé, she’d understand that a month was not nearly enough time for her to recover and be able to do the things she used to. He still slept on the floor next to her bed, holding hands with her every night.

“What if we had Anakin appear with her?” Obi Wan suggested from the corner of the room, rubbing his hand over his beard.

“As another man breathing down her neck, telling her what to say?” Mon tilted her head in the most condescending way possible. “I don’t think so.” She was a good politician, and a good person, but she managed to get on Anakin’s nerves like no other. Maybe that was apart of her appeal; Padmé had a similar tactic when she was in the senate.

“Or as the forbidden lover who broke her free of her abusive relationship?” Bail argued back, and everyone in the room made a face.

“Your wording may be off, but you have a point,” Obi Wan agreed.

“I really hate turning my relationship with my wife into a holo-drama,” Anakin knew they’d push this type of thing as soon as she came back, but it didn’t make it any easier to hear.

“You can’t say it doesn’t sound like a holo-drama, Skyguy,” Ahsoka laughed, the only lighthearted one in the room, as always. He gave her a forced smile and she stuck out her tongue at him in defiance.

“Well, however we do it, it needs to be done soon!” Mon threw her hands up into the air dramatically, turning all attention to her. “You won’t even let us propose the idea to her.”

Anakin shook his head, shutting his eyes tight but doing his best not to shake enough to wake Luke. “You don’t get it, she can’t—”

“You know she’ll agree,” Obi Wan finished the thought, and placed a hand on his friends shoulder. Anakin refused to look at him, knowing his gaze was one of a helpful father, and he couldn’t exactly be mad at him when he looked at him like that. “Padmé will do anything for her people, it’s the core of her nature.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s good for her,” Anakin grumbled, sounding much like Luke had before he’d fallen asleep, grumpy from sleep deprivation.

“And you know what’s best for her?” Ahsoka quirked an eyebrow at him, and he made a face.

“Yes,” He said, before he realized how that sounded. Not like him, like Vader. God, he hated when that happened. “No. Maybe?”

“You know how that sounds?” Mon looked and him in a way that made him want to rip out her throat. He stepped towards her, anger coloring his face as fear began to rise in the pit of her stomach

“You can’t begin to understand—”

“Let’s not start a fight,” Obi Wan interrupted, and Ahsoka held him back with a hand on his shoulder. He looked back to her, and she gestured to the child attached to his chest.

“You can’t exactly kill her with Luke sleeping on you, now can you?” She said with a tilt of her head and a scrunched face.

“I was not going to kill her,” Anakin insisted, stepping away from Mon and walking out of the room, Ahsoka and Obi Wan hot on his tail.

“Well, you seemed awfully close to it,” Obi Wan pointed out.

The group walked into the children’s room, where Anakin set Luke to sleep in the bed across from Leia’s.

“Jedi don’t kill innocents,” Anakin frowned as Obi Wan and Ahsoka looked between each other.

“You’re not exactly a Jedi anymore, Anakin,” Ahsoka rubbed at the back of her neck as she spoke. “And that’s okay, I’m not either, but..”

“Look, I get it,” he groaned in frustration, leaning against the wall. “I’m not a Jedi, not exactly, but I’d rather if Padmé didn’t know that.”

“You’d like if I didn’t know what, now?” Padmé entered the room with a glowing smile. She was brushing out her hair, preparing for sleep.

“Hello, angel,” Anakin approached her, placing his hands on her shoulders waist and kissing the corner of her mouth. She kissed him back but didn’t drop her question as easily as he would’ve hoped.

“Seriously, though, what am I missing?”

“Nothing...” He smiled sweetly and Ahsoka just rolled her eyes behind him.

“Okay,” She accepted his lie easily, and he grinned, though it made something stir in his stomach.

It wasn’t right that she’d let it go so easily, that wasn’t like her, and he worried about being too much like Vader. He knew she still saw them as somewhat the same, and it made him angry. But that rage only made him more similar to the monster he despised.

“Can you excuse us?” Anakin nodded to Ahsoka and Obi Wan, who both left, though hesitantly. Everyone could see, and feel, the anxiety that begun to fill her gut at those words, even the twins stirred in their sleep.

When the two had closed the door behind him, Padmé stepped to him with a worried expression, looping her hands around his neck and pressing her body flush against his.

“Is something wrong?” She asked sweetly, and he flinched, pushing her away.

“No, I’m just worried for you,” He walked back into their room, and she followed closely behind.

“Why?”

“Typically, you would’ve made me tell you what was going on..” He sat on the bed, and the springs made a creaking sound underneath him. “But you just brushed it off. Why?”

“You want to fight?” She gave a confused, exasperated face and sat next to him.

“You know that’s not what I mean,” Anakin groaned. “You’re scared of me.”

She didn’t answer him, she couldn’t, really, not truthfully. With a sigh, he took both of her hands into his.

“I don’t want you to be scared of me,” He pleaded with her, being as gentle as possible. “Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it. Anything to make you feel better.”

“I don’t know,” Padmé looked away from him. “I.. I guess you could tell me what you were talking about before?”

“Fine,” He agreed, and before she could protest, continued. “I didn’t want you to know that I’m not really a Jedi anymore.”

“What?” She furrowed her eyebrows. “I mean, the order is dissolved, so it’s impossible for you to be a real Jedi...”

“Yes,” He hated having to explain what he meant, as it only incriminated him more, but he continued. “I can’t be a Jedi completely, not like Obi Wan is. There’s you and the twins, of course, but there’s something else too.” He could feel as Padmé began to tense, not only under his touch but in the force as well.

“The prophecy, it’ll never work if I confine myself as a Jedi,” Anakin stopped there, not wanting to continue. The dark side had tempted him much more on this new path, but it’d been worth it. Finally, he felt in control. When it had tempted him as a Jedi, it nearly always won, but now, he found himself holding back.

“I trust you,” She assured him, squeezing his hands, and he believed it.

“I love you,” he whispered to her, and pressed his lips against hers.

Padmé watched Anakin closely as he slept that night. It wasn’t fear or paranoia that kept her eyes trained on him though, it was a deeper sense of curiosity, maybe longing. Somewhere deep inside her, she wished to be in his arms again.

It was hard to explain to him just what she was feeling. He thought she was scared of him, which wasn’t untrue, but there was something else to it. Padmé knew that he was capable of falling to the dark, but she also knew he was much stronger than that. Palpatine created Vader

for a reason; if Anakin had been susceptible enough to the dark side to fall, there would be no purpose for a clone. Clones weren't perfect replicas, and it was no doubt that the power Anakin possessed had been watered down in his copy. Vader was sustained by the dark side, and the skill that had been crafted into his very veins, beaten into him since his creation, two things Anakin lacked. Or at least, he had.

Before he even confessed it to her, it was quite obvious that Anakin had dipped into the dark side of the force. He wasn't a Sith, he never could be, but his new connections with the force would be seen as almost perverse by Jedi like Master Windu. Obi Wan seemed to trust his judgement though, and that settled some of Padmé worries. Maybe the dark side would help in his efforts against Vader.

Anakin shuffled in his sleep. She'd allowed him to stay on her bed that night, for the first time, and he was out like a light as soon as his head hit the pillow. Padmé did her best to keep a foot of distance between them, but he unintentionally attempted to close it at every turn, reaching out for her in his sleep. She sighed as she moved closer to the wall.

As much as she wanted to let it happen, let him hold her and kiss her however and whenever either of them pleased, something in her screamed every time he touched her. She couldn't help his kisses, or hugs, but the anxiety they set deep in her stomach made her feel sick at prolonged touch. The thought always itched at the back of her mind; the punishment that Vader would administer for this behavior.

He could barely stand having another man hold her hand, or touch her arm, for the things she'd done in the past month, she couldn't imagine what he'd do. She knew deep down, it was only a matter of time before he found her. As much as Anakin tried to keep it from her, she knew he was searching, had been searching since she'd been rescued. It was impossible to hide from the man who controlled the Imperial Army, a billion men at his disposal for whatever function he pleased.

The above ground parts of their base had been covered after her arrival, leaving their no natural light. Often, they'd be forced to power down all unnecessary electronics for hours at a time to avoid detection. Still, staying in once place was the best option; troops surveyed every corner of the galaxy, looking for her.

Best case scenario, Anakin would be able to defeat Vader before he had the chance to take her back. But it was much more likely she'd fall into his hands sooner than that. Even with her mental shields raised, she could hear his voice in her head. His hands on her body.

It felt like a constant competition of ownership, where she did her best to establish herself as her own, or even her husbands, but knew she'd always be marked as the Emperor's consort.

Even the rebels looked to Padmé in that way, with pity that they'd been too late. That she'd already been his when Anakin arrived, that it was too late and there was no chance of truly saving her. Obi Wan and Ahsoka disagreed, Anakin disagreed so thoroughly it made him red with anger at times, but, secretly, she wondered if everyone else was right.

Chapter 11

For the first time since her arrival on the rebel base, Padmé stepped out of her rooms alone. Anakin was training with Obi Wan and Ahsoka, and the twins were having a playdate with another one of the rebellion children, supervised by Threepio.

Nerves were bundled in her chest stepping out into the hall, but luckily, it was empty. Really, it seemed the whole base was empty as she walked, until she reached a large docking area, filled with X-wings and other ships and supply crates. The whole area was crawling with people, moving around like busy little ants.

When she entered, almost every head turned to her. Most of them were respectful enough to quickly look away, but she still heard as they whispered to one another.

“I was beginning to doubt she was even here.”

“Shouldn’t she be with the twins?”

“Where’s general Skywalker?”

She shook her head, regaining herself as she made her way through the area. She hadn’t told Anakin or anyone else besides Threepio of her intention to explore the base. Threepio had heavily advised against it, and it was no doubt he’d tell Anakin as soon as he returned from training. Meaning she only had a small while on her own. Her husband did his best not to be controlling, but things like this were impossible for him to accept.

It wasn’t long before Padmé found her friends, talking amongst themselves and another pilot. She’d hoped to go undetected by them, she hadn’t had the opportunity to speak with any of them one or one, and was looking to avoid it.

“Padmé!” She heard Breha’s voice call out, but kept walking, pretending not to hear. She shuffled away quickly, before she was stopped.

“Padmé,” Breha repeated, closer now with her hand on her friend’s shoulder. Padmé turned to her with a forced, warm enough seeming smile. “Come talk to us.”

Breha led her over to Mon and Bail, who excused the pilot when they saw her heading over.

“Oh, dear,” Mon exclaimed as she saw Padmé approaching. She wrapped the smaller woman in her arms without a thought. “We’ve missed you!”

“Thank you,” Padmé replied, though she wasn’t quite sure that was the correct answer.

“Yes, I’m afraid we haven’t seen much of you since you arrived,” Bail added, and the rest of the group nodded. She swallowed down her anxiety and gave an awkward tilt of her head.

“We’ll have to have lunch sometime soon,” Breha took both of her hands into hers. “Though the food here is quite drab, your conversation is surely something I’d enjoy.” Padmé

nodded with a genuine excitement at the prospect. The Alderaanian queen had always been so sweet, and really one of her dearest friends.

“If your husband doesn’t keep you away, that is,” Mon broke the nice moment with a sour tone. Padmé was shocked at the comment, she hadn’t heard anyone say anything bad about Anakin since her arrival. He seemed to be very respected amongst the troops.

Bail and Breha gave their friend a disappointed look, but the senator raised a hand over her heart and continued on.

“What?” Mon asked, offended. ‘I’m only being honest,’ She turned to Padmé now with a look of concern that made her want to move away from the scene. “Anakin is not the type of man any of us expected you to marry, darling. He’s a bit too controlling.”

“Anakin isn’t controlling,” Padmé argued back firmly, feeling the need to defend him. “I love him very dearly and your insults of him only say things about your personality, not his.”

“If he’s not controlling, why won’t he let you help the rebellion?” The senator crossed her arms over her chest. “Has he even asked you?”

“Mon, don’t,” Bail sighed, raising his eyes from the floor to come to Padmé’s aid. “We both know Anakin has done more for the rebellion than we can ever thank him for. He brought back Padmé too.”

“Maybe,” Mon looked away from them, but her voice was still cold. “But he doesn’t know how to put the rebellion above his personal affairs.” With that, she walked away from them, her heels clicking against the pavement.

“What did she mean? About me helping the rebellion,” Padmé asked as soon as her friend was out of earshot.

“We were hoping you’d be able to speak to the public on behalf of the rebellion,” Bail confessed. “But Anakin is worried for you, and has kept us from asking you directly.”

Padmé felt her eyebrows scrunch together as she took the information in. She understood the worry, and had been quite aware of his overprotectiveness, but risking the rebellion for her emotional well-being seemed too far.

“I’ve got to go,” She told Bail and Breha quickly before walking away, not even giving them the chance to say goodbye.

Training had always been Anakin’s away to let out pent up emotions. And lately, there was more than a few things he’d been keeping inside. Vader itched at the back of his mind like a stubborn tick, reminding him of his own weaknesses at every turn. He hadn’t been strong enough to save Padmé then, and now it seemed he wasn’t strong enough to heal her. Ahsoka assured him that no one would be able to do that but herself, but he still doubted his usefulness knowing he couldn’t just fight the pain away with a few good strikes of his saber. Really, he’d grown accustomed to kissing and hugging the bad things away from the twins, who’s only real problems seemed to be nightmares and broken toys, at least as far as he allowed them to know. They were unaware of the target on their back, even if they felt his anxiety peaking at the black outs they had to endure.

Sometimes, late at night, he'd wake up to Padmé sobbing. He'd sit in the dark, unmoving, knowing nothing he could do would soothe her distress. Even killing Vader wouldn't dim it completely. Obi Wan had told him that before he even left to find her, and though he still had a hard time accepting it, he hoped he could when the time came.

The last few nights had seen improvement, at the very least. Padmé had begun to let him sleep in her bed, though she wouldn't let him hold her. He didn't quite understand the hesitation; she'd allow him to kiss and hug her briefly, but anything that lasted more than a few minutes seemed to make her almost sick. He'd been tempted, more than once, to reach into her mind for the information, but he thought better than to actually go through with it.

Anakin took a particularly heavy swing at the training droid that had been firing at him, cutting it in half and sending two pieces clattering to the ground.

"Woah," Ahsoka laughed, letting her saber hang beside her as she assessed the damage he'd caused. "Y'know they asked you to stop doing that for a reason? We have a limited supply of these things."

"Yeah, yeah," Anakin waved a dismissive hand at her. It didn't matter anyway, he could build a new one from scraps, and it would give him something to focus on in the workshop.

"That's the fifth one this month," Obi Wan piped up from the corner, where he had been meditating. He saw little use in physical training anymore, and instead tended to only survey Anakin and Ahsoka's sessions.

"Hey! Did I miss number four?" Ahsoka counted on her fingers before pointing an accusatory finger at the older Jedi. "Don't try and swindle any bets, Obi Wan! You promised you'd tell me if I wasn't here!"

"Can we not make this into a game," Anakin groaned, sitting on the training mat before him with his heads practically between his knees.

"Sorry, Skyguy, I don't mean to be insensitive," Ahsoka apologized genuinely, but Obi Wan only sighed and got up from his place in the corner.

"I hate to see you act this way," he frowned, seeming a bit sadder than usual. His disappointment made Anakin's heart ache. "No amount of moping or violent outbursts on the training droids are gonna get you any closer to helping Padmé."

Anakin nodded, looking up at his friends. "I know, but what else am I supposed to do?" He hopped up from his sitting position and walked over to the water dispenser against the wall. "I can't kill Vader just yet, an opportunity hasn't even made itself yet."

"There's more that must be done to help her than killing him," Obi Wan reminded, and Ahsoka agreed with a nod as she gulped down an inhuman amount of water at once. Anakin wondered if Togruta's had that ability or if his ex-padawan was just weird.

"You should take her on a date," Ahsoka suggested when she'd finished chugging her water.

"A date?" Anakin made a face; though the idea didn't sound awful, it was quite absurd. "I've never been on a proper date."

“That’s exactly the problem,” She countered, raising her eyebrows as if to further her agenda. Obi Wan shrugged.

“That wasn’t quite what I had in mind,” He admitted. “But it certainly couldn’t hurt.”

“Fine,” Anakin agreed begrudgingly, though his mind began to race with ideas. “A date it is.”

Chapter 12

It was awfully cold in the underground base, and Padmé had naturally taken to wearing one of Anakin's spare robes. Her husband barely wore them, anyways, saying he'd grown used to the cold and preferred a simple t shirt and pants. It was really quite remarkable the tolerance him and the twins had, but the medical droids suspected her sensitivity came from her prolonged time on Mustafar, which simply wasn't fit for human life. If it hadn't been for the protective walls Fortress Vader provided, she surely would've perished.

The robe was made to be loose on Anakin, and so it completely enveloped her when she wore it. The modesty was a plus she had greatly considered, but was too afraid to say out loud, though she assumed her husband had at least picked up on it.

It had been a week since her encounter with Mon, and since then she'd been turning around the idea in her head. Presenting a speech in favor of the rebellion sounded absolutely terrifying, and yet somewhere deep inside her an urge burned to do it.

She'd begun to scribble together a rough draft, only working on it when she was completely alone, even Threepio being too much of a risk. She doubted Anakin would try and stop her, but she still didn't want him to know.

When he'd found out Padmé ventured outside of her room, he hadn't been angry, but there was still something there that made her hesitant to let him know about her plans. He'd been disappointed, scared even, and had gathered her into his arms, refusing to let go for quite some time. The way he held her was achingly familiar, as if he was terrified she'd disappear. He'd always held her like that, and it always made her heart sick with guilt.

Still, she was somewhat grateful for it, as since then she'd been able to sleep in his arms, making the both of them happier. He woke her up with a smile almost every morning, kissing her all over until the twins began to stir in the other room.

For the first time, Padmé saw a glimpse of the life she'd been so close to having. Of course, there was an ever present fear, but more so, there was a joy to it all. She'd braid Leia's hair and put Luke's into little mini ponytails (he begged her to after seeing his sisters pretty hair accessories), and Anakin had even asked her out on a date.

A date seemed absurd for them. Especially considering they'd been married for nearly ten years and had never shared a proper one. To be fair, five of those years had been durning a war and the other five spent apart, but still.

Anakin had shown up one day in their room, wearing a suit he'd probably borrowed from Bail or another one of the senators, that was decorated in medals he'd earned durning his time in the rebellion. The Jedi didn't give medals, but the rebellion did, and Anakin was more than happy to accept them, even if Obi Wan rolled his eyes.

In his hands he clutched a bouquet of paper flowers, which made Padmé grin.

“The twins made them,” He explained, handing them to her. She accepted them and pretend to smell them with a laugh.

“Lovely,” She grabbed his arm and allowed him to lead her out of the room.

Padm  imagined she looked quite ridiculous walking through a military base dresses as she was. Anakin wore a decorated military uniform, and it looked more like a general than he ever had, but she wore a long sleeved, high necked gown made of light blue silk. The dress had been preserved from her time as a senator, one of only a few Anakin had been able to save. She was thankful for it, and he’d managed to keep all her favorites.

People stared at them a bit as they walked with their arms looped, but it didn’t carry the same level of shame she’d felt earlier in the week. Instead, she was quite proud. Anakin had already been a war hero as she knew him, but a hero to the rebellion made him all the more honorable. It was an attractive look on him, really, and Padm  lacked the shyness to keep it from him.

“General Skywalker,” Padm  always had to greet him so properly in public, but sometimes it was quite thrilling. During the clone wars, when he served the republic, the title made her heart melt. She felt like a lovesick teenager with a crush.

“Senator Amidala,” he’d always return with her regal name, something that sounded better on his lips than anyone else she’d ever heard. Anakin was made to say that name, and it was an intoxicating talent that nearly had her blushing.

Often, on Mustafar, she’d miss those times during the clone wars. But now, she had no desire for them. The rebellion filled her with a feeling so much more complete, and best of all, she got to keep her handsome general.

The table had been set with a white cloth and plastoid wine glasses that could nearly pass as the fine dishes Padm  had once used a lifetime ago. More of the children’s paper flowers were in a vase made of an old bottle that had been spray painted light blue.

“M’lady,” Anakin held out her chair for her as she sat, and then moved to sit across from her.

“You put quite a lot of effort into this,” Padm  complimented as she noted the lights and makeshift decorations placed around the room. It was a small nook that had been set off from the rest of Anakin’s workshop, something that was left mostly to him as he preferred to fix things than leave the children to do other missions. The rebellion didn’t mind; they didn’t want to risk his safety before the real battle commenced.

“Me and the children spent the whole afternoon on it,” He grinned proudly, recalling how happy the two had been to help. “They’re rarely let in here, it’s a bit dangerous, but I figured I could trust them to listen to me.”

“You didn’t let them touch the lights, did you?” Some of the wires were sticking out, and it made Padm  a little on edge to think of the children near them. Anakin didn’t mind her nitpicks of his parenting, she seemed to indulge in being a worried mother.

“No, no,” Anakin promised, resting his hand atop hers. She took a deep breath and smiled.

It wasn't long before Threepio brought them their dinner. It wasn't anything special, just the usual rebellion rations, but he'd put it on fancy looking plates to make it feel more like authentic to what Anakin was going for. Padmé had no good feelings towards the food, but she never complained, Anakin, on the other hand, ate it like he was scarfing down a burger at Dex's. That was a common trait between people who grew up in outer rim, she'd noticed, the ability to eat absolutely anything without a fuss. Then again, he had once told her his favorite fruit growing up was black melon, something Obi Wan had gagged at the mention of. Sometimes Anakin seemed almost proud that he liked eating gross foods, but that was just how boys were, Padmé supposed.

When they'd finished their meal, Threepio swiftly took the dishes away, and Anakin was up out of his seat almost instantly.

"Is that it?" Padmé frowned. She wasn't disappointed by his efforts, but they'd only been alone together for an hour or two at most.

"Come with me," He held out a hand to her that she took easily, and allowed him to lead her away.

The two walked through the thinner, less populated halls of the base, and up a narrow spiral staircase Padmé had never seen before. It was rusty and almost felt as if would fall apart with too heavy of a step, so she did her best to tread lightly. Anakin seemed eager though, and pulled her along at a quicker pace.

Finally, when they reached the top of the steps, there was a small ladder leading up to a frozen hatch. She suddenly became all to aware of her breath making visible clouds.

"Are we going out?" Padmé asked in a low tone, as if someone might hear her. It really seemed like something they shouldn't be doing, but she also couldn't bring herself to protest.

"Yes," He whispered, and then laughed loud enough to startle her, the sound echoing down the stairs. "Also, no need to whisper, we're not breaking any rules."

She nodded, and watched as he reached up with gloved hands to unlatch the icy wheel. Anakin almost always wore a glove over his metal arm, but he'd tended to leave his other hand bare, especially recently. He was all too aware of how she preferred flesh, or even his robotic hand, to the leather touch she'd had forced on her for years.

The chill that rushed in as the hatch popped open made her shiver quite visibly, and he quickly took off his jacket and wrapped it around her shoulders.

"I should've told you to wear something warmer," He chuckled an apology, but Padmé didn't really mind at all, and only wrapped her arms around herself.

Anakin climbed the ladder first, his boots stepped out into snowy ground, she followed soon after, trying to ignore the biting cold of the metal against her hands.

They were not completely out in the open, she realized, but instead in a cave. The opening was about a hundred meters away, but she could see it was almost pitch black outside. Time passed so oddly underground, she hadn't even realized it was so late.

A faint blue glow fell over them, and when she turned to question Anakin about it, she found him grinning softly, with his eyes cast directly above them. Her gaze followed to be

met with an absolute wonder.

The cave ceiling glittered with sparkling blue lights, that seemed to dance around each other. When Padmé peered closer, she confirmed her assumptions; ice worms. Not just any ice worms, though, glowing ice worms, a species so rare she hadn't even learned about it in school.

Suddenly, a memory came rushing back to her. It had been late afternoon, and she'd spent the entire day in her reading nook, passing through novel after novel. Most of the books she requested from Vader were romances and fantasy, but on occasion she'd be given vintage holobooks as gifts. They were expensive items, older than any human she knew, and they fascinated her beyond belief.

One such book had come into her possession the same day her new guard had, some what of an apology for killing the last one, she presumed. So, after a week or two of her new guards antics, she'd settled down with it. Mostly, it was a quiet read, but one page fascinated her above all.

"Oh, come look!" Padmé called to him, and he quickly detached himself from his place by her door to come look over her shoulder. The page she landed on showed a gorgeous display of small glowing creatures she'd never seen before.

"Glowing ice worms," The guard told her, and she back at him with astonishment.

"Have you seen them before?" She asked, and he nodded easily, letting out a small laugh at her wonder.

"Maybe I'll show you one day," He suggested, and Padmé had giggled at the sad ridiculousness of the comment.

Now, though, he was showing her.

Padmé wrapped her arms around Anakin with a delighted squeal she hadn't even known she was capable of making, and he made an odd noise at the impact before chuckling.

"You remembered," she whispered into his neck. She was so happy she could cry, but the frosty climate probably wouldn't allow that.

"Of course I did." He let his hand settle on her jaw, but didn't allow for her to move too far away, as the closeness kept them from freezing. They stayed huddled together for a few moments as he placed short kisses all over her face. His lips were always warm, but out in the cold they felt hot and life-giving, like they were melting away any ice that tried to freeze her.

Chapter 13

Fortress Vader had finally become as void as life as it always felt. It wasn't long before Padmé's disappearance that the emperor had his home completely cleared of living staff, and all the droids shut down. He hadn't even put them storage, simply powered them off and let them stay unmoving in the middle of halls and rooms where they'd been working.

Mustafar was typically where Vader felt best, strongest, but in that moment, all he could feel was dread. The anger he'd expected to take over him was nowhere to be found, and the thought frustrated him to the point of nausea. The fury that usually burned within had been replaced with a much heavier feeling, like a rock had settled in his heart.

There was no place left for him on solid ground it seemed. The Imperial Center gave him the same feeling, if only a bit weaker, and so he found his only option was aboard The Executor. There, he still found himself weak, but at the very least he could bring himself to do his job, to take part in the sadistic pleasures he enjoyed. At least a hundred of Vader's own men had died by his hand in the first week after Padmé had been taken.

Realistically, he understood that it wasn't absurd for a man to be depressed over his wife's kidnapping. But Darth Vader was no ordinary man. In more ways than one, it was more than abnormal for him to be depressed over anything that could possibly be inflicted upon him. Sith did not get depressed; they got angry.

Vader continued to kill, to oppress, to feel the dark side burning deep in his soul, but sadness still itched at him. It didn't matter how enraged he could bring himself to be, even a sliver of the nonsense he'd let get to him defeated his entire purpose.

"We've got a lead," An officer had approached him one morning, approximately three weeks and two days after his consort had gone missing.

Vader didn't speak, only waited for the man to continue. Quickly, he did, though his voice picked up a new shaky tone from the nerves.

"A man, a Jedi, I mean," The officer stuttered, and Vader already felt the urge to snap at him. "By the name of Anakin Skywalker."

At the mention of the name, everything seemed to stop. It was a ridiculous statement, so ridiculous the Sith had felt as if he was about to choke. His wife couldn't have been taken by Anakin Skywalker. He was Anakin Skywalker.

"Don't be ridiculous," Vader scoffed, too distracted to even follow through with the killing part of the exchange that he'd been looking forward to. The officer seemed surprised at his reaction, and out of some odd form of masochism, continued to speak.

"We've received a holovid transmission," He told him, holding out a datachip. Vader picked it up as if it was a dead animal. "We attempted to trace it, but it was impossible."

Vader didn't reply. He walked over to the closest dataport and plugged it in. Almost instantly, the holo popped up in front of him.

Standing before him was his own image, his own face. Or at least, the one he lost.

“Hey, buddy,” The man said, a smirk plastered over his lips that made him look so punchable it hurt. “Do you remember me? You should.”

Before anymore could be said, Vader yanked the chip out of the port, and crushed it in his hand.

“Ridiculous.” The rebels were more insufferable than he thought. More like annoying children than formidable enemy. “If they want to play games, so be it.”

Vader would not stand for whatever tricks they were playing on him, whatever they could potentially be playing on Padmé. The thought of her being completely fooled tugged at his heart, but he did his best to ignore it and continue on. The rebels were fools, and they would pay for taking his things.

“Bring me another copy,” Vader ordered, and the small man scrambled away to fetch it.

Obi Wan sighed as he watched the holovid Anakin had made. Both Bail and Mon had enthusiastically approved of it, but he couldn’t begin to see why. The entire thing was meant to mock Vader, to provoke him enough to make him vulnerable to attack. But he’d already been quite provoked by Padmé’s disappearance.

The truth was, the rebellion was growing impatient of waiting for Padmé to be ready to help them, and Anakin was running out of ideas to stall. Obviously.

“So that’s what we sent him,” Anakin shrugged after the video had finished playing. He seemed quite unbothered by the fact that he had essentially just come out of hiding after five years of presumed death.

“And now Bail wants your face plastered over their next set of promotion,” Ahsoka assumed, her Master’s red face giving away the answer. “Are you excited to be a poster boy again?”

Anakin rolled his eyes. During the clone wars, him and Obi Wan had become quite known to the general public, and, despite the protests of the council, had found themselves featured in plenty of republic propaganda. Anakin had never minded it then; in fact, he secretly relished in it. Lately, though, his perception had changed.

“I’ll do whatever needs to be done,” He concluded, his gaze falling as he considered it. “I’m just afraid Padmé won’t be too happy about it. She’s worried for me as it is, and she certainly won’t be happy knowing I’m putting myself in danger while she’s sitting back.”

“Maybe it’s time you let her help, then,” Ahsoka suggested, though both her and Obi Wan knew it was a bad idea as soon as the words left her mouth.

“No, absolutely not.” Anakin stood his ground by literally stomping his foot on the ground, making him look like a child about to throw a fit. Obi Wan could’ve laughed if it wasn’t for the fact that the fate of the galaxy rested on a man with the mindset of a teenager.

“You can’t wait forever,” Obi Wan tried to be as gentle as possible, but Anakin still huffed to himself at the scolding. Often, Obi Wan forgot Anakin wasn’t a padawan anymore. He certainly acted like one.

“She’s my wife,” he argued, stepping up to Obi Wan as if to test him. The older Jedi didn’t even flinch; he was used to this kind of out burst. “I know her better than you do.”

Obi Wan sighed again and quietly left the room. Ahsoka would probably suggest a sparring match to Anakin and he’d blow off his steam, coming back a few hours later like nothing had happened. That was just how Anakin was. Padmé had lightened that attitude, but with her absence it had grown almost stronger. Obi Wan could only hope she’d put him in his place again.

Fatherhood had matured him, thankfully, but it didn’t do much about his temper. It was actually quite remarkable to see how calm he’d be with the twins, he had never yelled at them and punished them almost too lightly even by the Organa’s standards, but as long as they were out of earshot Anakin was not shy to going off on every person in the room.

In a way, Obi Wan had begun to share the same worries he knew Padmé entertained. Anakin was similar to Vader, undeniably. Though he did have an inherent goodness to him where his clone had an inherent evil, their similarities in personality made him uneasy. Unlike Vader, Anakin had the ability to control and use his traits for good, but that was only if he chose too.

With this in mind, the Jedi had begun to help Padmé construct a speech to broadcast to the public. They didn’t involve anyone but themselves; Mon Mothma was much too overexcited about the prospect and Bail Organa trusted her too much not to tell her, so it was just them. And Breha, though Breha mainly enjoyed the company.

They’d filmed it and even found a means to send it out without detection, but Padmé refused to do so until Anakin had approved it. Another thing that made Obi Wan worry. Even Anakin wouldn’t like the idea of Padmé asking for his approval of anything, but she couldn’t seem to listen to that logic when Obi Wan and Breha had insisted upon it.

When Obi Wan came up Padmé and Anakin’s shared quarters, he was greeted by her soft singing.

She sat next to the twins beds, singing them a lullaby as they slept. Padmé was glowing with bliss, a picture of motherly perfection anyone would fall head over heals for. As a teenager, Anakin would speak non stop about her beauty, admiring her from afar when she appeared in the holonews and magazines that he always seemed to find a way to catch. He would call her an angel. At the time, Obi Wan had found it troubling and desperately hoped it would pass, but now he could see his padawan had been right. He’d never admit it to anyone, but he was happy Anakin had broken the code for Padmé. He tried not to think about how things could’ve been if he had the courage to do the same for Satine.

“Obi Wan!” Padmé gasped quietly when she noticed his presence.

“Sorry to disturb you,” He laughed quietly, but she only smiled and shook her head, getting up to move to the other room and shutting the door behind her with a near silent click.

“You’re not disturbing me,” Padmé spoke in a normal tone now, and he adjusted to do the same. “What have you been up to?”

“I have some news regarding the empire,” Everyone avoided using Vader’s name in Padmé’s presence, for obvious reasons. Obi Wan wished he could have avoided mentioning the empire, too, at the way she flinched at the word. Still, he continued on. “Anakin had sent a transmission a few days ago, but I didn’t find out till today.”

“Of himself?” She asked with wide, fearful eyes, and he nodded solemnly. “I knew it was inevitable, but I wish I’d had a warning.”

“So do I,” Obi Wan agreed. “But I think now is the time we send a message of our own.”

Padmé looked unsure, biting at her bottom lip. “I don’t know..”

Before she could finish her consideration, Obi Wan’s transmitter began to beep furiously. He answered, and Bail’s image appeared.

“We’ve received a reply from Darth Vader, a public broadcast,” Bail said, and Obi Wan moved to shut it off, but Padmé stopped him, urging him to let the recording play.

Within a blink, the Sith’s dark figure appeared, and Padmé flinched at the sight. Obi Wan knew she shouldn’t be seeing this, Anakin would rather sleep out in the hall than let her, but he couldn’t deny her when he’d been forced to keep so much from her already.

“I’ve avoided letting the public know of the tragedy that occurred one standard month ago,” His voice was stiff, stiffer than usual. He looked almost nervous. “But now the rebels have made direct threats.”

Obi Wan resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Threats was a push. The most threatening thing Anakin had said was a rude joke reminiscent of the humor of a teenage boy. The holo the rebellion sent was nothing more than a glorified prank call.

“These traitors to the empire have taken my beloved wife from me in an attempt to weaken us,” Vader continued, clenching his fist to emphasize his anger. “Any respect I’ve ever held for these monsters is gone now. I’m sick at the idea of how they may be torturing her, and I am desperate to see her safe return.”

Padmé looked as if she was about to vomit. Her face had gone pale, her eyes empty as they stare at the blue projection of her husband. The worst thing was how genuine Vader sounded.

“I encourage anyone with any information to come forward, and the empire will reward you generously.” Vader paused for a moment, and suddenly Padmé felt as if they were gazing directly into each other’s souls. “Padmé, if you somehow see this, know I am doing everything I can to bring you back into my arms, my love. You’ll be safe, I promise.”

With that, the holo snapped off. Padmé didn’t move one bit, she couldn’t, it seemed.

“Send out the broadcast,” She said finally, and simply, in a way that made it clear she couldn’t say anything more.

Chapter 14

“He’s kriffing insane!” Anakin had been ranting to Ahsoka for the last hour. She’d tried wearing him out with sparring practice, but after a few hours of that he was still nowhere near calm and she was about to pass out. So she settled for this instead, at least she could sit down and eat her lunch while she listened.

“Have you ever known a worse person?” Ahsoka shook her head no, still chewing the gummy parts in the bantha surprise stew the kitchen had dished out today. She doubted it was real bantha meat, but tried not to think about it. “If I can even call him a person, he doesn’t seem very human.”

Almost everyone took to commenting on Vader’s lack of humanness while criticizing him, though they tended to avoid it in front of Padmé. It seemed to upset her, and though Anakin couldn’t begin to understand why, he did his best to not mention it in front of her.

“And now she’s locked herself in our room because of his stupid kriffing message!” Anakin’s hands flew up into his hair, tugging at it in frustration. “Even the kids are locked out! It’s all Obi Wan’s fault—”

“Not this again,” Ahsoka rolled her eyes with a groan, and Anakin scrunched up his face at her, upset she’d interrupted him.

“Are you saying it’s my fault?”

“It’s no ones fault.” His raised eyebrows dropped, and he frowned. He hated it when people made sense.

“Whatever,” he sighed, stomping out of the room. Ahsoka just shrugged as he left. He made his way down the corridor, stopping in front of he and Padmé’s shared room.

He knocked for about the hundredth time that day; no answer.

“Padmé,” Anakin practically whined, frowning at the silence. “You haven’t eaten since yesterday.”

Still, there was nothing. He groaned.

“I didn’t want it to come to this.” Anakin placed a hand on the door, trying his hardest to delicately use the force to move the door. He could’ve done it from farther away, but it just would’ve crushed the door, and Bail and Mon always hated when he did stuff like that.

The door slowly slid open on its automatic rails, and he continued to push with the force until it was open enough for him to squeeze through.

Padmé laid curled up on their small bed, which was pushed into the corner of the room to maximize the amount of floor space available. She had all the blankets swaddling her, and she looked quite comfortable, but she was sleeping far from soundly.

She tossed and turned and made small noises of distress, and Anakin quickly rushed over, doing his best to be gentle as he shook her awake.

“Wake up, angel,” He whispered worriedly, and at his touch she instantly bolted awake, looking at him with frantic eyes. He rubbed her arm soothingly. “It was just a dream.”

At first Padmé moved away, making Anakin’s heart lang with hurt, but after seeming to realize a bit, she threw her arms around him, pressing her face into his neck as she let out quick, panicked breaths.

“I-it was Vader,” She explained, and an anger began to swell in him that he had to do the best to repress. “In my nightmare.”

“It’s okay, angel,” Anakin soothed, tightening his grip around her protectively. Padmé’s breath shuddered as he did so. “I won’t ever let him hurt you, or even touch you again.”

Padmé only nodded at his promise, but he seemed satisfied with it. She couldn’t tell him how familiar his touch felt, or the details of the nightmare she’d just woke from. She knew he’d hate it, be disgusted by it, by her even, for being so weak her mind couldn’t escape Vader’s manipulations even now.

Padmé found herself in her greenhouse, tending to millaflower plants Vader had gifted her. He was always so generous, giving her whatever she pleased. The flowers from her home planet had been an especially generous gift, and she’d thanked him generously in return.

Suddenly, she came to realize his large hands were pressed against her waist, him standing behind her and watching as she worked carefully. He hummed, something he shouldn’t quite be able to do with his vocoder.

“These flowers are lovely, darling,” Vader complimented, and she grinned widely. She was quite proud of her plants. One hand traveled up from her waist, running up over her chest and to her neck. He held her jaw tightly, and stuck his fingers into her mouth. It wasn’t sensual at all, instead it felt like an owner reprimanding a disobedient dog.

“Thank you,” Padmé said around his fingers, her voice muffled. Logically, she knew she should be panicking, but instead the touch felt welcomed.

“Would you look here for me, my love,” Vader requested as he used his strong hand to force her neck towards the scene he wanted her to see.

The clear glass of the greenhouse made Mustafar clear to see, and the grand landscape of bright reds and oranges was laid out in front of her. In the distance, she could see a man. He was tall, and walked confidentially, carrying a blue, ignited lightsaber. He looked as if was going into battle, or had just won one, or both.

As he came closer, it became to clear to Padmé that the man was Anakin. But he it didn’t seem like Anakin, not at all. The energy around him glowed red, and he sneered in a wicked way that made a lump form in her throat. Still, some part of her was excited to see him. He was handsome as ever, and his look reminded of her of the nights he’d come rushing into her penthouse, his clothes still ripped from battle, looking like he needed a trip to the med-center before anything else, just for him to pick her up into his arms and kiss her furiously till they

were both out of breath. Those kisses always shut up her worries, even if they would find themselves only hours later, with him shirtless on her bed as she tended to his wounds.

When Padmé tried to look back up at Vader, she found she was no longer staring into red lenses. Instead, Anakin held her there, his grip all the same. It was the same Anakin who'd been walking toward her, the one who looked so much like her late husband, but with one stark difference; fear-striking golden eyes.

She let out a small gasp at the sight, but only choked and coughed with his fingers still in her mouth. He laughed at her, making her go red with embarrassment.

"Silly girl," Vader practically spit his words, making Padmé flinch. His hand traveled back down to her throat, not choking her yet, but standing near ready in case he felt the need to.

"Were you hoping for Ani?" he asked with a sneer, saying the nickname as if it were a curse.

"No, I—" Padmé tried to answer, but Vader's grip grew tighter, making her choke on her words.

"Don't lie to me," He snarled, his gold eyes burning holes into her. "Do you pretend I'm him? When we're alone at night?"

Padmé nodded, being honest as she could. He quickly spun her so she was facing him, looking up at him, their faces so close. She'd only been this close to a maskless Vader once in her life; when she'd gone to Mustafar, hoping to save Anakin.

"Close your eyes then," Vader demanded, and though she didn't mean to, she did. Pain surged through her body, and her mind felt completely violated by his abilities, as if he was touching her thoughts with his own artificial hands, rather than the force that extended from his being. Of all the things Vader had ever done to Padmé, this would have to be the worst. No amount of physical harm could compare to the feeling that ran through her veins when he did this, like she could feel his hot breath on each of her nerves and blood vessels.

Padmé felt safe in Vader's arms, safe under his touch, hell, she even craved it. Anything that would appease him, anything that would keep him from searching her mind, implanting the visions and feelings he felt she needed. She could watch her babies die in her arms a million times if he willed it so, or make her feel the ecstasy of new love that kept her infatuated with the idea of what lay under his ghastly mask and Sith formalities. When he reached into her mind with the force, she was his completely, and no amount of Jedi morality could save her, no light could even reach her.

Vader had always been insistent that the ability was a blessing. Maybe he was right, maybe it was the only thing keeping her alive on Mustafar. The artificial feelings kept her from fighting, from caring about anything but him. Maybe it wasn't so bad.

Jedi couldn't do such things, not to a mind as strong as hers had once been. Sith didn't work on the same basis, they didn't care what was possible, they would bend any being to their will even if it broke them.

Padmé wondered quietly if Vader's control over her was from his newfound Sith power, or if he'd just broken her down till she was susceptible. Surely, Anakin never had the power to

do these things, he'd told her so himself. Or had he? Doubt seemed so persistent with her now.

It couldn't of been more than a minute that her eyes were closed, she was sure. But still, so much changed. Padmé found herself staring into honey colored eyes, surrounded by the scents of her home planet. Vader had been so generous to give her those flowers. She couldn't help but smile.

"How do you feel, my love?" He asked, brushing a loose strand of hair behind her ear with a lazy grin. Her husband was so handsome, so kind, and if she could she'd rave about it for days.

"I love you," Padmé laughed, not quite answering his question, but Vader couldn't bring himself to care as she swung her arms around him. The planet outside still raged like a deadly beast, but here, inside the quiet little utopia he'd built for her, she was happy. He'd always keep her happy.

Padmé felt dizzy in Anakin's arms, recalling the dream to herself as she pretended to sleep, not quite ready to talk to him.

His fingers brushed through her hair so gently, and his chest moved with his breathing in a way that was so human she wished she could capture the moment and live in it forever. Even without the casket-like suit Vader wore, he'd never feel as human as Anakin. A human couldn't do the things he'd done.

When it was happening, Padmé had never realized what the pain that shook her body meant. Briefly, it occurred to her that maybe it was one of the gods of her home planet, punishing her for the crimes that Vader had already inflicted his own punishment for; for losing their baby. Pregnancy, birth, and children were sacred on Naboo, as was life, and her failure to deliver may have put her out of favor with the gods. But the gods of Naboo were far from vengeful, and now she knew her children were safe.

The pain she'd endured was not otherworldly, or a punishment. It was something she'd always known, but was willed again and again to forget. Now, with Vader so far and unable to control it all, the memories resurfaced like needles pushing into her skin.

It didn't matter if it had all been false, though, Padmé couldn't tell Anakin of the doubts and adoration Vader had implanted inside her. The idea filled her with shame and regret. She knew it was illogical, she knew she had no control over it, and yet still she couldn't accept that she was completely out of the wrong. How could she admit to enjoying something like that, even if it wasn't her choice? How could she let people know she loved a monster?

Chapter 15

Padmé's holomessage had been broadcasted while she slept. They'd decided long ago it was best that way, to do it while she and Anakin slept to avoid any major complications. They slept early that night, per her request. He was more than happy to oblige, wrapping her in his arms and drifting off easily, even if he wasn't quite used to sleeping so early.

As they slept, everyone watched carefully.

"I am Padmé Amidala, former queen and senator of Naboo," The prepared speech started quite formally, something that would've sounded awkward coming from Anakin or even Obi Wan, but just right from her.

"Thought most of you know me as the current consort of Emperor Vader," Obi Wan had personally wanted his name scrubbed out, but Padmé insisted she be clear and specific. "I have recently joined the rebellion. I have joined for my own well being, for my husband, Anakin Skywalker," She couldn't imagine how angry Vader would be to hear that, and maybe even older Jedi that hid would be shocked. "But most importantly, I've joined for you. I swore at a very young age I'd dedicate myself to the people, and I intend on keeping that promise.

"I want you all to know of the evils of the empire, to be aware. I was kept brainwashed for so long, and I know many of you have been a victim of the same blindness," Padmé kept her face firm, but sympathetic as she continued. "I implore you to ignore the shame or fear that holds you back from rising against our imperial shackles, and join us in our efforts to take down the Empire. Though you may believe no rebels reside near your place residence, be assured that we do. We are every where, and no billion man army will stomp us out.

"We are more than people, we are based on an idea that simply cannot die," The recording began to flicker as the empire intercepted the message. "And in that, we are immortal. You are immortal. So fight, for yourself, for your peers, for your children and lovers and parents and friends. Fight for this idea."

The recording cut just as the empire was able to completely override it, and Padmé's full message was cut short by less than a millisecond. It was too late, everyone had seen it and those who hadn't would no doubt view it later from recordings. Once something was broadcasted, it existed forever, especially something important as Padmé's words.

The force shuddered that night, but it was far from unpleasant. It shook with hope, and light, and warmed Anakin as he slept, even if he didn't know it's cause.

Vader and his men were of the few who found no comfort in the night. Hope did not feed the Sith the way it seemed to feed everyone else. His wife's words stung every part of his body, something difficult to achieve considering he was more than used to the feeling.

His suspicions had been right; they had tricked Padmé into believe some random rebel was him. To the public, Anakin Skywalker was dead, but few knew the truth; he'd been reborn as Vader. His men couldn't know that, though, no one could. It was a sign of weakness he was not willing to expose; even if it meant saving his wife's life.

Instead, he'd take a more characteristic approach.

"I want the DS-1 battle station prepared for my arrival effective immediately," Vader commanded, and the commander he'd spoken to nodded quickly before scurrying out of the room, seemingly letting out a quick breath he'd been holding before.

The Death Star was the prize of the Empire, large enough to rival the moons of Iego, and the most powerful weapon the galaxy knew, second to only Vader himself. If anything would show the rebels the severity of the situation, it would be the death star.

At one point in time, Vader had promised himself to never let Padmé aboard such a ghastly machine, but he was sure that would be the least of anyone's worries. Besides, how much would the death star really effect her when she'd been lying next to him for years. A monster, much more a weapon than a mere man, who she had loved for so long; who she'd allowed to love her.

When Padmé returned to him, things would be right again. He found he couldn't operate properly without her, as if he really were a machine with a missing part. Vader was fueled by her, her love and devotion like the oil between his gears. It was more than just her propaganda that kept the Empire moving, it was her direct effect on him. She was his complete motivation, she always had been.

Five years prior, Mustafar.

Vader's hands gripped the metal railings tightly. Within him, the power of the dark side surged, overwhelming his senses with the desire to kill, to fight, to do anything that would move his own progression along. He was not a patient man, he hadn't been bred to be so, but now he was forced to wait. The feeling of pent up energy made his hands shake.

His master had promised him a prize at the death of Skywalker, a task he'd completed to perfection, if he could say so himself. It was one of the few weaknesses Sidious had allowed Vader to retain from his original. The very thing that pushed Anakin towards any semblance of dark in the first place, whilst also keeping him from ever truly falling over the edge. Vader had been programmed with Anakin's attachment engrained into his own psyche. Somewhere within the deep, dark pit of his soul, a small flame had stayed lit for Padmé Amidala.

Really, Vader resented it. He'd been under the impression that he was meant to be free of the hindrances that made Anakin too good to be a true Sith, but Sidious apparently had other plans. His master had found his frustration at the revelation quite amusing, he'd cackled as Vader promised to kill the woman, to rip her children from her womb and murder her in the most brutal way possible.

Sidious ordered him to see Amidala after his raid of the temple, maybe there he'd work up the nerve to end her. He couldn't bring himself to do it. Instead he kissed her, held her, and

told her it would all be okay. He believed all he said, too. Padmé would be safe with him, he would protect her.

When she came to him on Mustafar, he tried again. He said the sweet things he couldn't help but say, and touched her and held her and kissed her in a way that made every part of him sick. Briefly, Vader considered if he deserved to touch her. He wouldn't allow himself to dwell on such silly notions, though. Of course he deserved it, she was his prize, he owned her and would do whatever he pleased with her.

When Obi Wan arrived, something in him cracked. Had this man been with his wife? Had he touched her and loved her only as he should be permitted to do so? Obi Wan's death was necessary, his master had made that clear, but as he became overwhelmed with jealousy, he found himself to be motivated by something new. Something more than his masters commands or his own inherit greed for power.

Vader tried to kill her again, to choke her and let her die with the children. He couldn't. He tried to kill Obi Wan, to make him pay for touching what was rightfully his. He failed again.

As he burned, he cursed Padmé's existance. It was a marvel Skywalker managed to stay sane for so long, when every little thing he did was for that woman. She could tear apart his very life, he knew. And still, he found himself wanting her. Needing her. Padmé would need him too, with the absence of the man she once loved.

When Vader awoke, he couldn't quite piece together what had happened, or what his life had been before. All he knew was Padmé, and his prize would be his, no matter the cost.

Chapter 16

When Padmé awoke, the emptiness of Anakin's spot beside her chilled her spine. She hadn't been much of a morning person in the last five years, but at his absence and the realization of what had happened the night before, she almost instantly sprung out of bed.

Her bare feet padded against the cement flooring, going to check the twins room first. It was quiet and vacant, their little beds made up perfectly. Typically she would've been proud, but now her stomach dropped.

Would Anakin punish her disobedience? Take the children away and claim she was an unfit mother for endangering herself? Everyone would believe him, take his side, she knew. People already thought she was insane, helpless without her husband by her side, just a hurt little thing he'd saved and took as a pet to nurse back to health. No longer was she viewed as Padmé Amidala, the strong politician, but instead as the emperors victim, the damsel in distress to the rebellion hero.

She collapsed against the frame of Luke's bed, gathering his sheets and bringing them to her face to inhale his scent. Already she prepared for the reality they'd been taken from her. It was likely, it was what Vader would've done, and much sooner too. Padmé sobbed into the soft blankets, curling in on herself as she felt bile rise in her throat and her breathing become uncontrollable.

“Padmé, Padmé,” Her name was called at her, and thought it sounded as if it came from a distance away, it was being shouted in her ear. Someone shook her, forcing her to look up.

Anakin stared down at her with furrowed brows and worried eyes. Despite the possibility of his anger towards her, Padmé found herself reaching up and pulling him down to hold her. He accepted the gesture easily, gathering her up so his figure swallowed her almost entirely. It should've felt suffocating, but instead she took great comfort in it.

“What’s wrong, angel?” He asked in a whisper, but it only triggered another wave of the sobs he’d managed to push down with his comforting.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Padmé cried into his shirt, surely leaving a stain of tears. Her voice was wrecked and shaky, and it made him wince to hear. She pulled away from him just a bit, to look into his eyes “Please bring them back, please. I’ll be good, I—”

“What are you talking about?” Anakin was more than confused. Had she had another nightmare? “What are you sorry for?”

“The broadcast.” Padmé answered with a frown, and Anakin made an “o” shape with his mouth, finally understanding her worry.

“You did great, angel, why should you be sorry?” He smiled, rubbing her arm reassuringly, though it did little to aid her confusion.

“I thought you didn’t want me to...”

“I didn’t,” Anakin confirmed. “But I was being stupid. I can’t stop you from doing what you’re best at, especially when it’s gonna help so many people.”

It had taken Anakin quite a while to calm down after seeing the message that morning, but he was glad he had finally come to understand (with Ahsoka and Obi Wan’s help, of course) as it seemed to be paying off now.

The two were quiet then, and Padmé’s breath finally came down to a normal rate, with the help of Anakin’s own breathing couching hers.

“Where are the children?” She requested finally.

“Eating breakfast in the dining hall.” He’d brought them to eat with Breha, who often planned educational activities for the rebellion children. They were doing some science experiment that involved some sort of mess today, and so Anakin had been able to get them to make their own beds in preparation. The twins were always better behaved when they were excited for something.

“Oh,” Padmé felt a little dumb at her assumption now. “I had thought you’d taken them. As punishment.”

Anakin was silent at that, not sure what to say. It was an awful thought, and though he knew she couldn’t help it, the idea made him almost nauseous.

“I would never do anything like that,” He promised finally, and she nodded. “I’m not like him. I’m not going to punish you for anything, ever. You’re my wife, my equal.”

Padmé leaned into him then, and he rested his chin atop her head. Anakin could only hope she believed what he said, because he did mean it.

The DS-1 Battle Station was really a site to behold. Even it’s most reluctant architects took pride in its creation, and the more enthusiastic had been so proud of it they’d gotten their necks snapped for lack of humbleness.

Vader couldn’t say he disliked the weapon; it wouldn’t be an accurate representation of his feelings and it would be a dastardly statement from even a man as untouchable as him. Still, he wasn’t exactly fond of it.

The thing was large and dark and foreboding, and it did a more than decent job at representing the true terror the weapon brought to anyone in its path. Vader was more than attracted to the power it gave him, but other than that, he didn’t care much for the death star.

The interior was sleek, everything in shades of black, white, silver, and gray. Palpatine had done so intentionally, even designing Vader’s suit in those colors, but more recent imperial projects used deep reds as an homage to the Imperial Consort’s signature color during her time as queen of Naboo. Vader knew Sidious would be disgusted by the way he had praised and worshipped the woman in everything he did, but the old rat was dead now, his worthless opinions dead with him. Besides, it had been Sidious’ fault that he still held a flame for her, and it felt only appropriate now that it would reflect upon the Empire he’d built.

The Death Star had stayed void of red. If Vader wasn't fond of the station, there was no doubt Padmé would be repulsed by it. Even in the beaten down state Vader had last seen her in, she wasn't weak enough to be able to hold back from forming an opinion on such a monstrosity. And she surely wouldn't appreciate her image being plastered all over it.

Unfortunately, her long-standing lack of association with the Death Star would have to come to a halt for his own sake. The weapon had come to be positioned over Alderaan.

It was not the first time Vader had threatened the destruction of a planet, though, if things didn't go his way, it would be the first time he actually went through with the destroying part. People were well aware of the power of the death star; it had blown up moons of several out of line planets over its short time operating, many of which were larger than the small planet of Alderaan.

There was no question if the planet knew of its potential doom, for it wasn't long before a representative had commed in asking the purpose of the occupation over a historically peaceful and cooperative planet. Their act did little to fool Vader, though, who'd been aware of the Organa's rebellious tendencies since the Empire's creation.

"Emperor Vader," The representative stiffened as the Sith walked into view of the holo. "I'm sorry if there's been any confusion, but we don't quite understand—"

"Save the formalities," Vader put a hand up to gesture for the man to stop, and it worked quite well, as he shut up almost instantly. "I would like to speak to Senator Organa."

"I'm sorry, but Senator Organa is not available currently."

Vader could almost laugh. It was no surprise Bail wasn't on Alderaan. He'd be with the rebels, probably with Padmé, even, and he'd be stupid to have his base on his home planet.

"Well, you be sure to have this message delivered to him at your earliest convenience," Vader sneered, if the man had any sense, the message would be with Bail effective immediately. "If Padmé Amidala is not returned to me within one standard week, this entire planet will be destroyed."

Before the representative could respond, the comms cut out. He was well aware that the entire planet would be evacuated within a day, but Vader couldn't bring himself to care much. The planet's destruction was more than enough of a threat, and every citizen would be considered not only a refugee, but a criminal, hunted down just as the Jedi were. That was a worse fate than any Death Star could bring.

After Padmé had calmed down, she'd gone to find Breha and the children, and help them with their lessons for the day. The rebellion children were more than eager to learn and play, and gathered around the women's large skirts like bees to their hive, following them around the base.

The group did their science experiment, which had been a model of Mustafar's terrain that involved the destruction of mass amounts of class in a simulated volcanic eruption. Padmé was sure such a topic should've bothered her, but the children's wonder at the display had

been more than enough to distract her from any unpleasant memories that may have resurfaced.

Later, Padmé picked a few of her favorite holobooks to read to the children. When she'd been a teenager, she'd spent any time between royal and senate duties at the library in the capital of Naboo, reading holobooks to children, especially those who were unable to read due to learning disabilities or poor education. Many refugees had found a new home on Naboo, leaving many unschooled children to be taught, and so Padmé did her best to help both politically and hands-on in that area.

As she read, Anakin watched her from the corner. She hadn't noticed his presence at first, but when she did, she found herself blushing and earning a few giggles from the older children who were too aware for their own good. Padmé could remember a time when Anakin had escorted her home to Naboo, and saw her reading to the children there when she found a small pocket of free time. He'd always been in love with her, he told her again and again, but seeing how she was with those children made him fall so madly in love he wasn't sure he'd ever get over it. She'd laughed at what she thought was just a silly teenage crush then, but now, she found herself just as in love.

When the books were done and the children prepared for a midday nap, Padmé excused herself to fetch some tea for her and Breha. On the way out, Anakin stopped her with a hand on her exposed shoulder. The touch wasn't invading or cruel, but instead comforting, like her whole body was warming happily under him.

"You're amazing with them, yknow?" He told her, and she just grinned as her face turned red. Somehow, her husband always managed to make her feel like an infatuated school girl. Wasn't she supposed to be the older one?

The two shared a brief kiss before Ahsoka came to drag him off for training, leaving Padmé alone with her cold tea. She sighed as she warmed it again, and hoped Breha wouldn't notice.

The news of the Emperor's threat had trickled slowly through the base, and as the day neared an end, both Padmé and Breha had been totally unaware of any danger, besides the uneasy feeling that was obvious even to two non force users such as themselves.

Bail approached them after the children went off to see their families for dinner, with a somber look on his face and lines that showed an obvious worry.

"Darling, what's wrong?" Breha cupped her husband's face with his hand, and he sighed. The woman looked back to her friend apologetically before walking off with him to discuss whatever had happened.

Padmé worried for the man, but tried not to let it get to her too much. She'd know the trouble soon enough, and hopefully it'd get sorted by then.

She rushed after Luke and Leia, who'd already made their way to sit next to their father in the dining hall for dinner. Their food was in front of them, and a plate was placed at an empty spot next to Anakin, where Padmé sat carefully, sensing his tense mood.

“How are you?” She asked him, and he put on an almost painfully obvious fake smile.

“Fine,” he lied, before turning to Luke and ruffling his hair a bit. “How’s dinner, buddy?”

Luke made a face, like he always did when asked that particular question, and Anakin just laughed. Even though the twins had only ever known the rebellion food, they despised it. Anakin had asked Padmé about it before; her theory was they somehow remembered the expensive formula Breha had been feeding them their first year or so of life on Alderaan.

Before Padmé could probe him any further with questions, the holoscreens flickered on to show the night’s broadcast. Today, though, Bail showed up in front of them. He seemed just as tired as before, if not more so, and Padmé felt a knot tie itself in her stomach.

“With today’s unexpected news, we will be preparing for more residents here,” Bail announced. The crowd was much more silent than usual, listening intently. “We aren’t quite built for that many people, and so any current residents willing to relocate should inform me immediately. We have bases on nearly every planet and any should be happy to accept new sentience into their ranks.”

With that simple message, the feed cut out, and the quiet buzzing of conversation filled the room again, but at a much lower tone than normal.

“What was that about?” Padmé asked Anakin, and his eyes drifted away from hers.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, and took a half-hearted gulp of water that was mostly to avoid speaking.

“Anakin..” She prepared to scold him. His secret keeping had been the main cause of their martial problems since she returned, being well aware of that, he groaned as he rubbed his hands over his face.

“Sorry, its just hard sometimes,” Anakin admitted, and Padmé rested her head against his shoulder before he continued. He spoke in a low voice, though she was sure the children were too preoccupied with their meal to be listening in. “Vader has positioned the Death Star over Alderaan, and he’s demanding you in return for the planets safety.”

Anakin threw the words out like it was a rotten fruit he’d bit into, quickly and without much grace. Padmé could only sit dumbstruck as she processed it.

“What are they gonna do?”

“Let him blow it up.” Anakin answered simply as he turned back to his food. She tried to follow his example, but couldn’t quite bring herself to follow through. She knew she wouldn’t be able to keep it down.

Chapter 17

Anakin hadn't been happy to have been pulled away from training to attend a political meeting, but he never would be happy to attend anything political, so he guessed it didn't matter much what he'd been doing before.

Around the table was a similar set of faces; Bail, Mon, Obi Wan, Ahsoka, and a few other rebel leaders with names Anakin had never quite learned to pronounce and therefore refrained from attempting to say. They all had somber expressions when he entered, but that wasn't out of the usual.

"What is it now?" He asked with a biting tone as he entered, Ahsoka following in behind him. Obi Wan gave him a scolding glare.

"We've received a message from the emperor," Mon was the first to speak, which was a surprise. The woman rarely addressed him directly, as she seemed to have quite a distaste for him.

"And?" Anakin pressed when Mon didn't finish the thought. Bail looked up at him with teary eyes that made him reconsider his attitude. He'd never seen the man cry, and he wasn't fond of the sight. It felt like the foundation of the very base was shaking below him.

"He's threatened us with the destruction of Alderaan," Obi Wan said before Bail was forced to do it himself. Anakin's face dropped, and as if it couldn't get worse, the Jedi added: "And Padmé's return is his price for its safety."

Anakin's brows furrowed together, and behind him he heard Ahsoka gasp.

"That's ridiculous," He scoffed, almost laughing. He'd never had the best hold on his emotions, and the anger that welled in him now was displayed with some manic sort of look. No one in the room took much offense; Anakin's outbursts were more than expected. "There has to be some other way."

No one answered him, and he swallowed hard, fearing their thoughts. Anakin couldn't help it as tears began to well up in his eyes, and his chest shook with muffled sobs.

"He can't take her," He did his best not to cry as he said it, but he felt as if he was choking. He turned his gaze directly to Obi Wan, looking at him with pleading eyes, as if somehow his master could fix it. When he'd been younger, much, much younger, he'd truly thought his master had that power, and would give him the same look. It made Obi Wan's gut twist with sadness.

"I promised her."

"Alderaan will be evacuated," Bail spoke finally, somehow able to clear some of the tears from his eyes despite the feelings Anakin was pushing into the room. Anakin's most powerful emotions often effected people around him, even those who lacked force sensitivity, but Bail seemed strong enough to work through it. "Padmé is too great of an asset to be let go."

Anakin wasn't quite sure what to say, but something in him feared any further conversation would turn the tide of opinion, and so he stayed silent.

Padmé did her best to keep her eyes to her plate. She knew all around her, people were staring and whispering about her, wondering why she'd been traded for an entire planet. Alderaan's people would be spared, sure, but it didn't mean nothing was lost. Thousands of years of history would be destroyed with the planet, not to mention wildlife and any people who may be missed by the sweep of evacuation.

Bile rose in her throat as she continued to think about it. Breha was probably sobbing in Bail's arms now, knowing she would never return to her home planet. Padmé knew what it felt like to be a queen who felt helpless to save her people, it was a guilt so gut wrenching she often wondered how her fourteen year old self never threw up on Obi Wan's shoes.

Anakin had scarfed down his food quickly, and was now coaxing the children to finish the green parts of their own meal. He frowned as he noticed Padmé's untouched plate.

"You need to eat, angel," He reminded her softly, catching her attention. She'd been pretty zoned out, apparently, as she practically jumped out of her seat at the sound his voice.

"I'm just feeling a bit sick," Padmé wasn't lying, though Anakin took it a bit differently then she meant, even if it was out of his own avoidance of the obvious topic.

"Do you need to see the med droid?" He began to feel ill himself at the worry for his wife.

"I don't think they could fix it," Padmé sighed as she picked up her fork and poked at a beige lump of something on her plate. Hesitantly, she took a piece out of it and raised it to her lips. The taste wasn't awful, but it was barely present enough to be anything.

"Is this about.."

"Yes," she answered after swallowing down the food in one big gulp. Anakin cast his eyes away from her then, looking like a child who'd just been reprimanded.

"It wasn't my idea, it was Bail's." He told her, still looking away. Padmé hadn't doubted that it was a group decision, but it didn't make it any better.

"I'm not mad at you," She promised, placing her hand atop his. "This is all just so upsetting."

"I know," Anakin agreed, looking back to her and flipping his hand so their fingers could lace together. "But we all decided it was for the best."

Padmé nodded, and did her best to give him a weak smile. For a moment, she knew she couldn't let herself care what the people around her were thinking or saying. She leaned forward and kissed him, because it was all she could do.

At night, all unnecessary power in the base was shut off. Newer children would often weep at this, Padmé had her first few nights too, but it wasn't long before one grew used to it.

She even found her eyes would adjust to the dark, so she could see the shadows of Anakin's face as he slept. She would often watch him like that, but tonight was different. Tonight Padmé found herself staring at him intently, trying to memorize every bit of his face and wishing she could kiss him all over without him waking up. It took absolutely everything not to kiss him again.

Before they'd gone to sleep she'd pressed a dozen kisses against his face, and told him how much she adored him, and he'd smiled and gone so red she could even see it in their pitch black room. Anakin was never good at taking compliments, which Padmé thought to be a real shame; he was always so deserving of them.

She was quite sure it was his blushing face that set her over the edge, but for the first time since she'd been reunited with him, she'd asked Anakin to make love to her.

He'd been surprised to say the least. Anakin was sure she'd never wanna do anything like that ever again and he hadn't minded that reality one bit, but he went ahead with her request all the same. Padmé couldn't help but giggle through it all. He didn't seem bothered, he just grinned and laughed with her, even if he wasn't sure what was so funny.

Now, she watched as she slept, his body warm and golden despite the sunless home that he'd resided in for the last few years. Anakin's body had always been littered with scars, but now it seemed she couldn't go an inch without finding a new one. Padmé wondered where he'd gotten them all, thought she knew most were from the glass he'd landed on when he fell. Still, there must be happier ones, scars he earned while making toys for the twins and the other children. Or scars he'd earned training with Ahsoka and Obi Wan when either sparring partner went a bit too far. Not all of his scars were painful memories, because he wasn't a completely pained man. Maybe that was what truly separates Anakin and Vader; Anakin had actually known real happiness and love.

Padmé felt tears prick at her eyes as she pressed the lightest kiss she could manage to his temple, and slowly shuffled out of bed. She moved the wardrobe and put on a flying suit and boots. Before she left, she wrote a holonote to leave on their bedside table.

"I've gone to work in the gardens early. Love you, Padmé."

She hoped that would stall him long enough in the morning, even if he'd probably pull some force nonsense that would prove otherwise.

Padmé didn't have the best knowledge of the layout of the base, but she knew her way to the starships, and that was enough. She picked the quietest one and took a deep breath as she took off, praying no one was close enough to the hanger to have heard her. She punched in the coordinates, and before she knew it, space had melted to streaks of stars outside her window.

Chapter 18

As the ship slowed out of hyperspace, the green and blue mass of Alderaan came into view. Padmé had always admired the planet's beauty. It was quite similar to Naboo, though it leaned towards the cooler side, and tended to extend up towards the skies instead of sinking below into lakes. The idea of its destruction chilled her, but the goosebumps seemed to pop out of her skin at the sight that hovered over it.

The Death Star loomed over the planet eerily, in a way that made her bones ache and her stomach twist into a thousand tiny knots. It was large and very imperial looking, and although Padmé had always had some idea of its existence, she'd never been able to accurately imagine it. Though, she never tried to, either. The weapon was admittedly one of the things she tended to avoid about her husbands empire.

Despite the bad feelings that welled up in her, she approached it. It wasn't long before the built in comm was beeping furiously at her.

"Unidentified craft, state your business," A stale voice commanded.

"This is Padmé Amidala," She said weakly, knowing it was more than enough.

There was silence on the other end of the line, till something clicked and suddenly her ship was moving without her command. The tractor beam sucked her into the docking port, but Padmé couldn't bring herself to watch what was happening. She breathed deeply, as if it was her last few moments of air.

When the ship finally came to a halt, Padmé forced herself to get out of her seat and walk down the ramp that had extended out of her ship. She knew that if she didn't, a few troopers would come and force her out. Or maybe Vader would do it himself, she couldn't imagine he'd like the idea of anyone else touching her, even in that context.

It wasn't surprising to see him waiting at the bottom of the ramp, but her heart still dropped. Maybe some desperate part of her hoped she'd walk out realize this was another cruel nightmare, but every moment it continued she came to realize it was realer than anything this awful should ever be.

"Welcome home, love," Vader greeted her finally, breaking the silence and her train of thought. He'd noticed that she had zoned out, and his mind instantly jumped to any possibility of the rebellions sick tricks. Had they drugged her? Brainwashed her? He practically shook his head in an attempt to rid the thoughts away. He couldn't think about that yet, he'd just have to have the med-droid check her later.

Padmé only nodded in reply, which raised his worry more. Quickly, he placed a large hand on her shoulder and guided her away from the hanger.

The two moved quickly through the halls, though she struggled to keep up with his large strides in familiar fashion. Vader would have smiled at her if he had the capacity to. He had missed this; he had missed her.

Soon, his quarters were before them. Though usually quite dark and empty, his rooms had been stocked with dresses and books and all the other things he knew his wife to enjoy. The cooking-droids on the station even made her favorite pastries for her, though they'd had to be reprogrammed to even have the capacity to do so.

When the doors closed behind them, Vader finally wrapped his arms around her and pulled her to his chest in a tight hug. Padmé didn't react much to it at all at first, only stumbled at the suddenness, but eventually she slowly wrapped her arms around him as well.

"I missed you so much," Vader murmured into his wife's hair. He noted how well kept it looked, but knew that was most likely for the rebellion's own benefit while using her in propaganda. He snarled at the idea.

"I missed you too," Padmé's voice was so small it could've been missed if not for the silence of the room. She trembled under his grasp.

"You don't have to be scared, my love," Vader promised, noticing her shaking. "You're safe now."

"What about Alderaan?" She asked, her voice still meek, but persistent now.

"What about it?" He was certainly confused by her question. Did she really care so much about the planet after its leaders had kidnapped and tortured her for months? She'd always been kind and caring, but this seemed ridiculous.

"Is it safe?" Padmé pushed, now stepping away from Vader to look into his red lenses. She could see his eyes just a bit, and it gave her an advantage over him when staring him down like this.

"Yes, it's safe," He confirmed finally, and she let out a deep breath.

"Thank the goddess," Padmé sighed to herself as she sat down on the couch behind them. He followed her example, but was much more rigid in posture.

"Are you okay?" Vader had taken a lock of her hair and began stroking it as he spoke to her. Typically, Padmé would pay no mind to this, but now she eyed his hand suspiciously. He noticed her movement but made no motion to stop.

"I'm fine," She said, her gaze breaking away from his large, gloved hand. "Will we be returning home now?"

"You've barely been back with me for any time at all," Padmé knew he must be pouting under that helmet with his current tone, and she almost wanted to roll her eyes. "We don't have to think about that yet."

"Come, let me show you the rest of our quarters," Vader beckoned her to follow in a way that made it obvious that it was a command rather than a request. "You've never been on the Death Star before."

As Padmé stood to follow him she considered his words. She'd always really hoped she'd never have to see this ghastly machine.

Anakin awoke to the sound of the children crying. He felt sick, too, and though he'd had many mornings like this when the children were babies, they never got easier. The coldness next to him was startling as well, but he did his best to suck up his worry and go tend to the children first.

"Daddy!" Leia shrieked as she came running through the door with Luke close behind. She ran into her father's arms and let him lift her from the ground, though it didn't seem it was his attention she was looking for.

"Where's mommy?" She asked. Anakin watched as Luke poked around the room, even opening his father's large trunk as if he'd find Padmé hiding there.

"I think she went to the gardens," Anakin told her, hoping to reassure her, though he deep down he wasn't so certain himself. Both twins gave him a pouting look as they scrunched up their little faces.

"I don't think so," Luke shook his head. He'd walked over to his father now too, pulling on his pant leg to let him know he wanted up too. It was a bit of a struggle to carry them at the same time when they were so big now, but Anakin still hoisted Luke up with his other arm.

Still in their pajamas, Anakin walked out of the room in search of his wife. He hoped he could find her and settle the children's worries, but they'd only taken a few steps down the hall before they were stopped.

"Anakin," Ahsoka stepped in front of him and children quickly. Behind her, he could see that the base was in chaos. People were running about and shouting at each other, and it was all so loud he could already feel a meltdown coming on from the children.

"What's happening?" Anakin asked, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Breha came up from behind Ahsoka, a large group of children gathered around her skirts.

"It's better if we discuss this in private," Ahsoka nodded to the two children that were attached to him, especially Luke, who had been gripping his shirt tight enough for his little knuckles to turn white.

"I'll take them," Breha said, Anakin agreed hesitantly, squatting to the group to let the children down safely. Leia made a disappointed face at this, but reluctantly took her aunt's hand for comfort as she was detached from her father. Luke, on the other hand, seemed completely opposed to the idea.

"I wanna see her first," Luke complained, his face red and streaming with tears Anakin hadn't even noticed forming.

"Luke, you need to go with Breha," Anakin sighed, forcing him to let go and prying him away from himself. "I promise you'll see her soon."

Luke didn't seem at all sure, but Leia took his hand into her own and pulled him away before he could doubt it anymore. Still, his eyes lingered on his father as he was pulled down the hall with Breha and the other children.

Really, Anakin knew what Ahsoka was going to tell him before she even said it. It was impossible to be him and not be hyper aware of his loved ones, especially when the twins shared the same worries, but above their force sensitivity, even, was common sense and a general knowledge of his wife. Her actions were predictable to him, yet still somehow unstoppable and infuriating.

“Anakin,” Obi Wan had placed a hand on his shoulder, giving him a gentle shake to gain his attention. He’d been silent since Ahsoka had told him, and hadn’t even noticed their change of location to the main hanger or the arrival of his friend.

“I think he’s in a shock,” Ahsoka pursed her lips and tilted her head as she stared at him. She’d expected him to be angry, she’d even prepared to have to talk him down or sedate him or something, but she definitely had not anticipated this kind of reaction.

“No,” Anakin said, but didn’t look up from the ground. “Just give me a minute.”

“Do you wanna sit down?” Obi Wan suggested, but the look on Anakin’s face would make you think he’d just compared him to a pile of Bantha poo.

“I don’t need to sit down,” he snarled, and if not for the severity of the situation, Ahsoka would’ve rolled her eyes. There was the Anakin she’d been expecting.

Obi Wan put his hands up and backed away a bit, giving him some space. Anakin’s arms were crossed over his chest in a way that made him look much more like a grumpy child than a brooding man who’d just lost his wife for the second time.

Sometimes, Ahsoka could swear she saw flecks of gold in her master’s blue eyes. Both her and Obi Wan had not known of Anakin’s survival until nearly a month after Order 66. She remembers the moment she was told he had fallen, and how her heart had practically fell from her chest. He’d told them time and time again; the need for Vader, for his clone, was proof Anakin could never be a Sith. But she still worried.

“I’m leaving,” Anakin said finally, breaking the silence that had fallen over the group.

“We have to meet with Bail—”

“I’m leaving to get her, Obi Wan,” Anakin added and his master’s eyes went wide. That wasn’t a shock, really, but he couldn’t go yet, not when they hadn’t even regrouped.

“I’ll go too,” Ahsoka offered, and Anakin smiled a bit, even if it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

Obi Wan stared at the both of them as if they were insane, and they both stared at him waiting for him to agree to the same stupid plan.

“I guess I have to come too,” He sighed, finally.

Chapter 19

At night, Vader crawled in besides her in bed, shaking it with his large presence. Padmé was never quite sure why he did this, as he always had, seeing as he couldn't sleep. But still, he did.

He wrapped his large arms around her, pulling her against him with a jolt. Padmé only reacted slightly, having been used to such actions from both Vader and Anakin. It was a bit harder for him to do so now, as she had pulled the covers over her. On Mustafar she rarely slept with the covers on; not only was it much too hot to do so but it was very uncomfortable to be in bed with Vader while also being trapped under a heavy comforter. With Anakin on Hoth though, a comforter had become necessary to withstand the cold, and in the freezing temperatures of space that was just as true.

He didn't seem to mind or even notice the extra challenge, and only tightened his grip when she made a soft, mumbling noise of sleep she hadn't meant to let out.

"Are you awake?" Vader asked, his vocoder making it impossible for him to do softly.

Padmé didn't respond. She hadn't talked much to him since she'd gotten back, only polite responses to keep his temper in check. Really, she was waiting for a punishment. He'd been uncharacteristically sweet since she'd arrived back, and spoke to her as if she had genuinely hated her kidnapping.

She hadn't pushed it, though the situation made her uneasy and quite on edge. Vader must know that she knew the truth, so why hadn't he done anything about it? Of course, he didn't have any intention of killing her, he would've done that long ago if he did, but wouldn't he appreciate the removal of formalities? He had always hated it when Padmé referred to or suggested the existence of Anakin, so why wouldn't he want to completely banish the idea from her mind? Padmé decided it shouldn't matter to her much; she should just appreciate his kindness while it lasted.

As her mind buzzed, his hand had moved to cautiously caress her stomach. The feeling made her nearly flinch, but she stopped herself. Often, this gesture meant Vader was preparing to spring into another scolding over her failure to conceive.

Not only had she lost their first child, but a year later, after the commotion of the rise of the Empire and Vader's coronation, she'd proved that she couldn't even seem to get pregnant in the first place anymore.

It broke Padmé, really, to find out she'd somehow become infertile. After a while trapped inside Fortress Vader with little to no company, she'd quite looked forward to having a baby to take care of when Vader suggested they try again, even if she wasn't quite done mourning the loss of her other child.

So when they tried and tried and tried to no avail, and Vader continued to remind her of her failings, she couldn't take it anymore.

It seemed he was being generous, now though, as he avoided the subject. Still, he continued to drag his fingers over her stomach, the expensive fabric making a soothing noise against the leather of his gloves that lulled her to sleep against his chest.

In the morning, Vader was gone. That was typical enough, and Padmé silently thanked the force for her some amount of normalcy. For a man who didn't sleep, he spent quite a lot of time silent in bed with her, but even he had limits, and by morning would go back to his duties.

She knew he'd probably join her again by lunch, so she took advantage of the solitude and stepped into the shower. The water was warm and the water pressure sturdy, and Padmé knew all of it had been an extra step taken on her behalf. Stormtroopers didn't get facilities as nice as this, and Vader obviously didn't shower, so the system had been put in place just for her. On Hoth the shower water was melted ice taken from the surface that had to be heated on demand, and so showers were a scheduled event, much to her and Anakin's distress as parents of two very fussy children.

Padmé felt a flash of pain in herself thinking of Anakin and the children. It wasn't unlikely she'd never see them again, but she had some hope the rebellion would be able to free her when they finally went on with their plans of overthrowing Vader, maybe they'd even get to her before the twins were teenagers. She didn't let herself hope too much, she knew it was likely that if any conflict did arise, she'd be killed in the midst of it, but if it that were the price of a better life for her babies she'd happily pay it. Besides, they'd have Anakin, Ahsoka, Obi Wan, and even Breha and Bail. They would be okay without her.

Padmé dried her hair and slung a silk robe over her shoulders, pulling it tightly across her. An attendant droid had already rolled in a selection of pastries and fruits for breakfast, and she picked out a scone infused with a few citrusy flavors of her home world.

The food on the Death Star was certainly better than on Hoth, if that was any consolation, but everything was hard to eat while she was aboard. Padmé was starving, really, and she ate a few pastries, but she couldn't help the nausea that itched at her throat all the way through it. It wasn't exactly easy to eat breakfast knowing you were rooming on a literal planet killer.

Soon after Padmé had finished her breakfast, a droid came rushing in to collect it. Before it left, though, it placed a large package at her feet. She couldn't ask it what it was or where it came from; the droid left much too quick and there was no doubt it was on silent mode. She eyed it suspiciously for a moment before picking it up and unwrapping the large bow wrapped around it.

She expected another gown. Though his variety of gifts were seemingly endless, Vader seemed to favor gifting Padmé dresses, as it was a bit of a gift to himself as well as her. When she arrived, her closet was stocked with a whole new wardrobe full of the same revealing gowns she'd worn on Mustafar, mostly in black. Padmé hadn't even tried to hide her disfavor of them now, preferring to wear the white fly suit she'd arrived in and somehow been permitted to keep, or the robes that managed to cover her a bit more than anything else.

When she pulled off the lid, she sighed at the confirmation of her assumption, but, when she lifted it out of its box, she saw she'd been somewhat wrong. It was a gown, yes, but it was

a light blue, almost off white instead of black, and padded with fur on the inside for insulation. It ran down to her ankles and snuggled perfectly against her neck, with large flowing sleeves that quite reminded her of the heavy garments she'd had to wear as queen.

Though Padmé really hated how much she loved it, she instantly found herself changing into it. Though her fly suit had been magically washed and returned to her every night, it was becoming quite the burden to wear it day after day.

It fit her perfectly, just loose enough to be comfortable without feeling like it was weighing on her or suffocating her. She did a small spin in it, and couldn't help but smile at the way it lifted from the ground.

"What do you think?" Vader's presence materialized from thin air, making Padmé jump back a bit and hold her hands to her chest in shock. He made a small sound that could have been a chuckle, but she wasn't quite sure as the vocoder hadn't been able to read it.

"It's gorgeous," She answered truthfully, her face flushing red. She wasn't quite sure if it was from embarrassment or anger. The gown was lovely, and he may have been the one to buy it for her, but that didn't give him the right to enjoy her in it as she knew he did.

"I'm glad you like it," Vader stepped forward, placing a hand on Padmé's (thankfully clothed this time) arm. She didn't step away from him in fear of his reaction, but she certainly didn't appreciate the contact either. It was better than durning the night, at least, when she'd had to allow him any touch he desired.

"You look gorgeous in it," He added, and Padmé could practically see the smile he would've given her if not for the mask. She remembered quite clearly how Vader had looked in the few moments they'd shared after the raid of the temple, and looking back she felt stupid for not realizing how different he was to her Anakin. Their smiles, especially, were different. Anakin grinned at her like the happiest man alive every time he saw her, no matter the circumstance, but Vader only smirked as if he were planning something. Her husband, her true husband, was a simple man when it came to those kind of things. There was no guessing to whether Anakin was happy, angry, or sad; he let her know, he let everyone know, really. Vader, though, wasn't as simple. He always wanted more than he let on.

"Thank you," Padmé said, trying to ignore the way his fingers pressed into her arm hard enough to bruise.

"I'm just so happy you're back with me, so I can keep you safe," He gestured around him, to the lavish rooms and gifts he'd provided. "To spoil you. Tell me, how were the rebel prisons?"

"You wish to find them, don't you?" Padmé looked away from him. "To destroy the base?"

"Of course, my love. It's only right that they be punished," He raised a hand to her head, lifting her chin so she stared into his eyes.

"I'm afraid I wasn't allowed out enough to help you," She lied, frowning a bit. "But they were civil, you must believe me. They didn't hurt me."

Vader laughed, or let out a sound close enough to it, but it wasn't lighthearted at all. "You're too sweet for your own good," he turned suddenly serious, "But you must know the scum who took you will pay."

Padmé didn't reply then. She wouldn't let him find them, she couldn't. She'd distract him, something, but for certain she knew she'd have to be by his side at all times to ensure it. Her hopes of spending the rest of her sentence as his wife in seclusion died quickly in her mind. Vader wouldn't let anyone but himself kill her captors, or more importantly, Anakin. Maybe, if she stayed with him, she could prevent it.

"Oh, my darling," Suddenly, he pulled her quite close to his chest. "I hated to have you away, but you must've missed me, too, didn't you? You must've been so lonely." It seemed silly that he'd care about that now, he'd never had a problem with leaving her alone on Mustafar for weeks at a time before. Padmé almost rolled her eyes.

"Of course I missed you," Padmé spoke into the leather of his suit. She was still pressed against Vader, and he held her there a bit too tightly for her liking. "But it wasn't so lonely."

Almost instantly, she regretted saying so.

"It wasn't?" Vader sounded calm, but she felt as he held her tighter still, almost crushing her in his arms. "Now why is that?"

Padmé couldn't answer. Not only did the words escape her mind, but her throat closed too tightly to let them escape from her mouth. The feeling was all too similar.

She tried to force his name from her mouth, to push away from him, but she was only left to gasp and writhe pathetically in his arms.

"Why don't you tell me about him?" Vader sneered, moving away from Padmé. She realized now it wasn't his grip choking her, but an invisible presence extruding from his fingertips. It made it only worse.

"I didn't think you were so stupid," He let her go completely now, but his invisible grasp was still pressing on her throat. She fell to her knees, making desperate sounds as she tried to pull in air. "Was my double that convincing? Or are you just a sucker for a pretty face?"

Padmé could barely register what he was saying as black began to enclose her vision. She knew tears were in her eyes. Suddenly, space didn't seem so cold. Instead, it was burning. Mustafar held tightly in her memory, and so did his grasp.

She couldn't even try to hold on as she slipped from consciousness.

Chapter 20

Over the years of being married to Vader, Padmé had begun to notice things about him that really should've made it obvious that he wasn't the man who'd thought of her as an angel all those years ago. Things that, as she lay struggling with raggedy breath and a throat that felt as if it had been crushed, made her feel stupid for not noticing.

She'd seen flashes of the dark side in Anakin, everyone had. But unlike Vader, who seemed to be after only power, Anakin seemed to only be tempted by the dark for nobler reasons. Mace Windu or Yoda may say there was absolutely no reason to let the dark into your life, under any circumstance, but Anakin had somewhat convinced her otherwise.

The way he desperately clung to her, Obi Wan, Ahsoka, and now the twins made it clear his only reasons for straying from the light had ever been fear. But, his love for all of them kept him so grounded in the light Padmé couldn't bring herself to fear this, or even care very much. Anakin couldn't fall, not completely; Palpatine had known that.

Vader hadn't even needed to fall, though, he was made already so submerged there was no way of even showing him the surface again. Padmé was reminded every time she tried to swallow. Vader was a monster, a monster she had the unfortunate honor of being married to.

Padmé had woken up to the meddroids still checking on her. They'd scanned every part of her body quite thoroughly, and as soon as she was conscious enough had administered some spoon fed medicine for her throat. It soothed the pain for the most part, but she found it made it impossible to sit up without feeling dizzy.

What part of him made Vader think she'd want to see him, she didn't know, but barely a standard hour had passed before he'd walked into their shared bedroom. Padmé had always prided herself on being able to read people, but Vader's expressionless mask made that talent useless, and she lacked force abilities that would give her any other insight.

"How do you feel, my love?" He asked as if he hadn't been the one to inflict the injury.

Padmé could've tried to force out an answer, but he wasn't worth the pain, and so she just simply gestured to her throat, indicating she was unable to talk. He nodded in understanding.

"I'd like to acknowledge that I shouldn't of put your incompetence— or rather, your nativity and weakness, at fault for the rebellion's actions," Vader practically started choking himself as he forced out a makeshift almost-apology. "I know they must have beaten you down quite a bit before you gave in."

It wasn't as if Padmé could disagree verbally, but her eyes still cast away from him. She hated it, but deep down he'd triggered some kind of shame and guilt for "cheating" on him. If anything, she'd been unwillingly cheating on Anakin for years, but Vader had a weird way of twisting her emotions.

"You know it's all fake now, don't you?" Padmé tilted her head in confusion, but she regretted it as she watched his fist clench at his side. "Anything they told you or showed you

was a lie. Anakin—" He paused for a moment, needing to recollect himself. "Anakin is dead, but the man you fell in love with isn't. I'm right here."

Vader danced around the whole clone thing very oddly, she noted, but obviously didn't comment on it. It was bad enough that he seemed to be moving closer to her, she didn't wanna spark his rage any further.

"Don't you love my strength, Padmé?" He grabbed her hand, almost delicately and held it between his own. If he really wanted to, he could easily crush every bone he held between his fingers. "My power? All I can give you? The galaxy is mine, and so are you. Isn't that wonderful?"

Padmé wanted more than anything to shake her head. To tell him no. To scream at him that he was wrong and sick and twisted and absolutely evil, but she lacked the ability to do so. Instead, she just nodded, hoping to spare herself anymore pain.

Vader brushed his false fingertips past her lips in a mock kiss to substitute for what he couldn't give her. For the first time, she was thankful for what Obi Wan had done to him. While it hadn't stopped his abuse completely, it had certainly limited him, and the thought of his lips on her now made her nauseous enough to almost be happy for such an awful thing.

Really, she couldn't believe she'd ever kissed Vader. It had been years ago now, when he'd come to her apartment to assure her that everything would be alright. He'd looked at her so oddly, but at the time she'd just thought it had been fear, confusion. Who could act normally after seeing what he had saw? Maybe the way he kissed her should've set her off; no distressed man kissed like that. Knowing he'd intended on killing her there, but found he couldn't, left her feeling torn now. In some sick way, Padmé almost wished he'd done it. But it wouldn't have been worth it, not at all. She'd suffer an eternity of life with Vader if it meant her babies could exist in the galaxy.

The next day, Padmé found her voice again, though it was very, very raspy and the med-droids advised her not to speak too much. She spent the whole day in bed flipping through holobooks and trying not to think too hard about Vader's return.

Of course, it came though. It always did. He walked in with his cape trailing behind him dramatically, and she gave him the warmest smile she could muster.

"I've been told you can speak now," He said as he sat beside her in bed, looking as uncomfortable as ever. Though she doubt he had the ability to look comfortable. He handed her a mug that was warm to the touch, and smelled of fresh herbs.

"Yes," Padmé croaked out, taking the cup from him. The container was large and Imperial looking somehow, a large contrast from the delicate tea cups her mother had passed down to her, but not unlike the ones she'd encountered at the rebel base. "Thank you."

"Of course, I want you better," Vader helped her bring the cup to her lips and she took a small sip of the warm drink. "Though I know it'll take time after the awful things those rebels did to you."

Padmé thought, briefly, of how she hadn't told him anything at all of what the rebels had done to her. Of course, there was nothing to tell that didn't also leave her at fault, but he spoke about it as if she'd told him awful stories about their torture. He did so so authentically that she began to wonder if he'd created some fantasy about it in his head. She wouldn't put it past him. Vader loved to fuel his own rage; it made him powerful. He'd told her so about a thousand times.

"What did they do?" Padmé asked. She knew she was pushing her luck, but maybe he'd be more inclined not to punish her for any misbehavior while she was still recovering. Still, she braced for backlash. It didn't come.

"I understand that you may want to forget, my love," Vader said, almost softly and definitely trying to sound sensitive, though it wasn't his strong suit. "It was very cruel. They attempted to convince you of Anakin's survival and my fraudulence as your husband, so that they could have a means to convince you to help their cause."

"It didn't work," Padmé insisted, and he nodded, though it seemed it was more of a confirmation to himself. She was just relieved he believed it.

"That's all I know, though," Vader admitted, taking Padmé's fingers into his own hand. "And you've seemed to block out the rest, is that right?"

She nodded, doing her best to keep her eyes from drifting away from him, as she knew it would give away the lie.

"I don't want you to have to relive that," He said, but before she could relax, added: "But I would like to try and reach in to see what happened. It'll help me find those monsters. You won't feel or remember a thing if you're unconscious, I promise."

Padmé's eyes went wide. He couldn't see her memories. If he did, she'd be doomed, not to mention Anakin or the children. Oh god, the children. Even the thought of Vader's filthy hands on them made her wretch.

"No, you can't," She said all too suddenly, shooting up from her resting place and startling him a bit. "Please, I don't want you to see all that. I don't want the chance of remembering it."

"I promised you you wouldn't, didn't I?" Vader waved his hand over her face, and Padmé found herself stifling a yawn. "Trust me."

"But.." It was too late then, she realized as her eyes began to flutter closed. All she could hope was that her mental shields were strong, and that the force would be in her favor.

Chapter 21

“Padmé,” A voice whispered her name, tired and raspy, tickling her ear in a way that made her giggle. “Angel, wake up.”

When Padmé’s eyes fluttered open, she found Anakin staring down at her, beaming to see her awake. His hands placed on either side of her, propping him up on his arms to hover over her. His skin was bare, she noticed, and tan, despite the sunless cold of Hoth that he’d inhabited for the last five years. Anakin could never stand the cold, not even on Coruscant.

He lowered himself down so their chests pressed together, and his lips could begin to litter kisses all over her jaw and neck. Padmé could barely gather her thoughts as he overwhelmed her with the bubbly, happy feeling of his kisses. She noted the lack of quilt, and the light, silk nightgown that rubbed against her skin gently as Anakin moved on top of her. If she craned her neck, she could see a light sheet crumpled at the bottom of the bed, but nothing more.

“Ani,” Padmé whined, using her hand to lightly grasp his jaw and bring his face back up to her own, so she could see into his glistening, blue eyes. They were more glassy than ever, so much so she wouldn’t be surprised if she could smell spice on his clothes—wherever those may be, as they were out of her sight for now.

“I’m sorry, angel,” Anakin must’ve read her mind, as his face dropped a bit. The moment was brief though, for before he even spoke again his grin came back. He was lucky it was infectious. “I think I had a bit too much to drink.”

“Drink?” Padmé asked groggily, bringing a hand up to her eyes to rub the sleep from them, but almost immediately as she did, Anakin took that and began pressing kisses to it with a laugh. She smiled along with his silliness, but for a reason she couldn’t quite place, she felt out of place.

“I should’ve been honest, but that was my first time,” He sighed, his breath hot against her skin. ‘Drinking, I mean.’ Anakin’s face went red. “Well, the other thing, too, obviously, uh... The order doesn’t allow either.”

Padmé chuckled as he stumbled over his words. It was their wedding night, or rather, the morning after, of course. She wasn’t sure how it slipped her mind. Naboo was warmer than usual, and she slept just a fine silk sheet and Anakin’s arm draped over her. She remembered thinking how the goddess must be smiling down on her to have her perpetually cold husband sleeping naked next to her.

The sheets shifted as Padmé lifted herself from their grand bed, earning a whine and a pout from Anakin that she chased away with a kiss to the side of his face. Her bare feet padded against the tile flooring and layered carpets all the way to the master bathroom.

In the mirror, she found herself smiling lazily back at her. Her curls were messy and her cheeks pink and glowing, even the way the thin straps of her white sleep dress fell over her shoulders made her giddy at the thought of how it all happened.

Padmé turned the faucet until fresh water began to pour out steadily, and cupped her hands below it to collect some. Hesitantly, she splashed it against her face, relishing in the coolness against her hot skin.

“Padmé?” Anakin slipped his arms around her waist, his long hair brushing against her shoulder as he leaned against her, pulling her back into his chest.

The breeze felt cool against her skin, but it was too sharp to be pleasant. Coruscant was often like this, especially high up like Padmé’s apartment was.

Her pregnancy brought many odd symptoms, but one of the oddest was sleepwalking. She’d lock the doors to keep herself off the balcony, but somehow, she’d still ended up there.

“How’d you get out here?” Anakin smiled softly, though his gaze was laced with worry. When Padmé looked down, she realized they were only feet away from the edge of the landing pad. She gasped, falling back into his tight hold even farther.

“I— I don’t know,” She admitted as they backed away from the edge together. Anakin refused to let go until they were sitting comfortably on her couch. He draped his own robe over her shoulders, seeing her chill.

“You really worry us sometimes, you know that?” He whispered against the fabric that covered her stomach, before placing a light kiss there. He loved to talk to the baby, Padmé had noticed, and sometimes she’d even wake up to him talking quietly against her womb.

“It’s not their fault,” Padmé sighed, rubbing circles into her own skin in some attempt to soothe herself or maybe even the baby, if that was how that worked. “They’re special, like you.”

“No, like you,” Anakin grinned up at her. “And I hope I didn’t do this to my mother; Tatooine may not have the same heights as we do here but I can’t imagine how it’d feel to wake up in the middle of the desert for no reason.”

Padmé just hummed at the warm feeling of his breath against her neck and his hands on her stomach. She was beginning to grow tired again, she could feel, as her lids began to be pulled down by sleep.

“Ani, darling, can we go back to bed now?” She asked sleepily, hoping he would guide her back to their shared bed as she felt dangerously drowsy.

“No,” A voice replied, but it wasn’t Anakin’s. Padmé blinked away her sleep, his flesh and metallic touch had been replaced by leather, and her baby bump had faded, leaving her grasping at her stomach.

The calm night of Coruscant had faded to the never ending turbulence of Mustafar, and dizziness had overtaken her drowsiness.

“Padmé,” Anakin whispered against her neck, but when she turned to find him, he wasn’t there. Only Vader remained, her prison warden of a husband who was really just locked in a prison himself. She may have been able to laugh at the irony if he didn’t torture her with it.

She shut her eyes tight, wishing and praying the image away. When she looked again, her wishes had been fulfilled. Mustafar hadn’t faded, but Anakin had returned to her.

“I missed you,” Padmé sighed against his lips, and Anakin just laughed.

“Did you?” Vader’s voice floated out of him, making Padmé feel as if she was choking on air. She couldn’t breathe, couldn’t speak, and the situation was not at all aided as he crashed his lips against hers.

The lack of air began to creep darkness into the edges of her vision, until she couldn’t see Anakin, or Vader, anymore. Until she couldn’t see anything.

The darkness was filled with the ever-present sound of his breathing tickling her ears.

Padmé woke up in the most violent way possible, gasping for air and bringing her hands over her chest and stomach to assure her existence to herself. She couldn’t believe Vader had promised her no pain with the experience.

He was no where to be found in the room, but an aching feeling in her head and gut told her he wasn’t far at all.

Chapter 22

“Were your dreams pleasant?” Vader had waltzed into the room to find Padmé still shaking under her covers. He felt a pang of sympathy at the sight, but pushed it away quickly. The dreams had been her own fault, as well as that of the rebel scum who’d filled her mind with silly fantasies.

Previously when he had looked into her mind, he’d always found thoughts of both himself and the man he used to be. Never, though, had both versions of himself occupied her dreams as two separate entities.

Vader had been disgusted by the image, to see a lesser version of himself play the hero in his own wife’s fantasies. Where had Anakin Skywalker been the last five years? Where had Vader? Everything he did was to protect her, and yet Padmé still had ideas of some silly boy running in her mind.

He wanted nothing more to blame it on the looks and body he had lost. It was always easier that way, to pretend Padmé was a shallow and selfish woman, but his ability to feel her emotions had always made that idea impossible for him to believe. Even in dreams, she didn’t at all poke at that part of his fall.

The truth was, if Anakin Skywalker had been victim to the same injuries in some noble battle, Padmé would love him all the same.

The thought just made him angrier.

“Well enough,” Padmé lied, her eyes meeting his red lenses. He knew she must be wondering what he had found. The answer was practically nothing of any use, only fodder for his jealousy.

Like he had assumed, they had used some type of masking device to convince her of her husbands survival. Vader wasn’t sure if she still harbored such thoughts, but it shouldn’t be long before he would know for sure.

“I’d like you to join me for dinner,” He told her and she nodded, casting her eyes away from his. He watched closely as she shuffled out of bed and picked a random gown from her closet, finally disappearing behind the fresher door to change.

A few moments later she returned, freshened up as much as she could be after such an awful sleep, and giving him a painfully forced smile. She looped her arm with his and they headed to the dining room.

Dinner was extravagant, as all things were when it came to serving the emperor and his consort. He watched her eat intently, as if it were a battle or political conference or one of the things he most certainly should pay attention to but likely didn’t.

“I found the rebel base,” Vader said suddenly, and much like it had all those months ago, Padmé’s fork slips from her fingers and makes a clanking sound on the plate. “The one that took you.” He clarifies.

“I— what? How?” This can’t be real, it absolutely can’t, she can’t believe a thing she’s heard.

“Your memories provided enough information to do so,” He was so calm about it all, and it made her want to throw up. “It’s already been destroyed. You don’t have to worry any longer, my love.”

Padmé was silent. Her entire life had been on that base. Anything that ever mattered and ever would. She’d rather burn on the shores of Mustafar than face this reality, she rather die. She still might. How could she live when everything had just been ripped from her?

“How could you?” Padmé screamed, standing up and placing both hands on the table in front of her, leaning towards him to look him dead in the red lenses that hid his eyes. “You’re a monster, a sick kriffing psycho!”

“I am your husband,” Vader countered smoothly, and she scoffed. Without thinking, she spit into his face, or, the black mask he called a face.

“You’re a clone!”

Now, Vader stood, and Padmé could feel as the table began to rumble under her touch. An invisible force pushed her back into her chair, and now Vader stood over her, in complete control. He took her jaw into his hand, squishing her face up.

“You’re just as naive as the day I met you, a stupid little queen who couldn’t even manage to protect her own planet,” He hit where it hurt, but Padmé was already too distressed to care much about what he said now. The only thing that kept her quiet was his invisible hand over her mouth. “All you were ever good for was a pretty face.”

Padmé wanted to shake her head, no, but even her neck seemed to be stuck. All she could do was feel as her tears ran down her face and neck. For the first time, these comments felt minuscule. In front of her was the man who’d murdered her children.

“It was so, so easy for them to fool you, wasn’t it?” Vader laughed, or did something close to it. He wasn’t really able to laugh, Padmé didn’t think. “I am your husband, this is your reality and it always has been. If you want the man you married on Naboo, the one you’ve known since childhood, you’re looking at him. There is no other me that exists outside of your dreams and delusions.”

Padmé choked on her sobbing, and Vader only shook his head, seemingly annoyed by her behavior. Finally, he let go and stormed out of the room. Some droids came to clean up, others to lead her to her room. It didn’t matter what they did to her, what he did, for all intents and purposes, Padmé Amidala was dead.

The force trembled with pure agony, searing the nerve endings within him. It was as if he could feel his rage as a physical thing, building in him, bubbling and snipping at his insides.

Vader, Anakin, one in the same and yet two individuals on the other side of the galaxy. Both felt as pain screwed itself inside their heads and pounded at their thoughts and memories, ripping their minds to shreds.

Vader didn't know if he could believe himself or Padmé. He was inclined towards himself, but her words had bit him like no other, and somewhere within he felt there was something more to it. She had been brainwashed, manipulated, and convinced of a lie, but he wasn't quite sure if it was him or the rebels who had done so. Furthermore, he wasn't sure if he cared either way.

Anakin, locked away from both Ahsoka and Obi wan, rubbed at his mind to clear the feelings that shook through him. He could sense her distress, he'd always been able to. He felt as it flared, it's presence strong for moments as passion roared in her, but now, the most terrifying of feelings, as it grew dimmer and dimmer. Even in captivity, Padmé had had the brightest signature he'd ever seen in a non force sensitive being, but now, it was barely visible.

She was dying.

Chapter 23

For days, Vader didn't speak to Padmé. It wasn't as if he hadn't tried; multiple times a day he'd come into her room, just to find her curled up under the covers, refusing to speak. It infuriated him, yes, but above all, it worried him. It seemed if he stepped too far away from her, he could barely feel her presence. That had never been the case before now.

Slowly, as days passed, he found himself growing more and more hesitant to part from Padmé's side. He was quite aware that she didn't want him there, but still, Vader spent hours every day sitting in the corner of the room, meditating silently and focusing on her presence in the force.

The only time her presence seemed to spike was at her distress, when her sleep betrayed her, and nightmares invaded her mind with images Vader restrained himself from taking a look at. He knew too much pushing at her mind may make her break even further, and he couldn't bring himself to risk it.

Still, the way Padmé woke from her slumber, calling out for him—no, not him, for Anakin—and shaking uncontrollably, it all made the Sith even more desperate for a window into her soul.

“Anakin!” She cried out into the dark, for the fifth night in a row. Her voice had grown shrill from the days of no conversation broken only by her nightly screams.

Usually, Vader would let the screams go unanswered, and allow her to fall back asleep on her own, but now, he found himself hesitating against that path.

“I’m here,” He said, as quietly as his vocoder would allow him to be. He was met with silence.

“No.” She whispered, struggling to get out the small sound. Vader stood from his seat in the corner, approaching her shadowy figure and reaching out for her hand. She flinched, but she didn't move away from him.

“Please, angel,” he pleaded, hating her red tinted image more than ever, as tears ran down her face like droplets of blood. Vader wanted nothing more than to remove the blasted night vision that seemed to curse him, just so he could hide from the reality of the mess he'd made of his wife.

“Don’t call me that.” Padmé snapped, moving to face him in an instant. She looked so clearly into his eyes, he began to wonder if she had some kind of night vision too.

“Why not?” Vader asked, almost nervously, quite the contrast from the anger even he had expected to erupt. “You’re my wife, my love, my everything. Why shouldn’t you be my angel?”

For a moment, Padmé’s gaze softened, her stiffness to his touch eased, and she took a breath, resting her hand on his leathered covered prosthetic.

“If I’m yours, are you mine?” Her voice radiated a desperateness that made his heart plummet. Vader hesitated, briefly, but didn’t take long at all to answer.

“Of course.” He promised, and he felt the bed move ever so slightly as she shifted closer to him. Padmé’s hands crept from his arms, to his shoulders, to his neck, and finally to the great large mask that sat atop it all. Typically, he never would’ve allowed her to do this, but in the moment, he felt as if he would die at her request.

“I want to see your face,” Padmé requested, or rather, commanded, as her voice had lost its previous shakiness.

“I’ll die.”

Vader didn’t refuse though, he couldn’t. If she wanted to see his face in the moment, he would remove his mask and allow himself to die in his arms. Without her love, what part of him was human? What part of him mattered? What was his purpose, if not to serve his love?

Padmé bit her lip, considering his words carefully. It was clear to both of them, now, that he was in the palm of her hand. She may be confused by the sudden switch, but it certainly wasn’t unwelcome, as her hand brushed teasingly passed the opening mechanism on his mask. She could end it, get revenge.

She would become the empress, she was next in line. She could set everything right, and she could die in peace without Vader desperately clinging to her life. She could be free.

Padmé’s hand fell from his face. She could do all those things, sure, but she didn’t want to, not really, and she was sure the effort of trying would kill her.

“I want to be in your meditation chamber with you,” She decided finally, and he nodded, almost shaking.

The next morning, Vader was gone when Padmé woke. She wasn’t exactly sure, as she didn’t always take the effort to look, but she was almost certain that would be the first time since her return to him that that had happened. For a moment, she panicked at his absence, but then remembered their agreement, and realized he must be preparing for their later meeting.

She sighed as she forced herself out of bed. Her legs felt wobbly after a week of almost no use, but she managed to make her way to the fresher and into the shower, the feeling of the water breathing new life into her as it washed away the buildup of dead skin and sweat that had gathered on her in the last week.

When the fresher door opened again, the steam came pouring out with it. Padmé enjoyed the refreshing cold of the room on her warm skin, sighing with her eyes closed.

“Padmé.”

A voice had her eyes shooting open, scanning the room for the owner, to find nothing. She wrapped her towel around herself tighter.

“Who’s there?” Padmé asked quietly, not wanting to alert any droids or guards posted outside her room.

“*It’s me, Angel,*” The voice answered, making her gasp in surprise.

“Anakin?” Padmé breathed out, hope and dread filling her all at once. “Are— are you a ghost?”

“*What?*” The voice echoed in her mind, in the typical Anakin fashion. She could almost see his face. “*No, I’m alive. And here, on the ship.*”

“What? How?” Padmé couldn’t believe it, by some miracle her husband was alive. And, presumably, her children. She smiled, clasping a hand over her own mouth to keep from sobbing. “He told me you were dead.”

“*Dead? No, of course not.*” He seemed offended by the very idea. “*I’d never leave you, Padmé.*”

“Where are you exactly?” Padmé asked into the air with a rush, her mind buzzing with the prospect of escape. “I need to see you, I—”

“*You will, angel, I promise.*” His voice floated around her like a caress, and she couldn’t even be mad at his interruption. “*But first, I need you to listen carefully. It’ll all be over soon.*”

Chapter 24

Anakin hadn't anticipated the struggle he, Ahsoka, and Obi Wan had faced in looking for Padmé. Of course, they all knew it would be hard. Everything under the empire was hard, especially when you were fighting against it but even when you weren't.

The Death Star had left its place positioned over Alderaan less than an hour after Padmé's ship docked, according to reports from the surface which Anakin had elected on checking in first. The visit was more than odd, finding the two attendants on watch being the only people on the evacuated planet. Soon, the people would return, but the still present threat of the Death Star weighed heavy on each mind.

The next stop had been Naboo. Ahsoka suggested Vader may take her there as an apology, and though Obi Wan and Anakin almost rolled their eyes at the idea, they found they had no better ones.

The state of the planet Anakin hadn't seen in years beat at his spirit. Portraits of Padmé hung from all available walls, depicting her in a bright red ensemble that made her position as the emperor's consort clear. They hadn't gotten taken down even after her galaxy-wide transmission, though the people didn't seem very fond of them at all. In the palace, beneath the stained glass image of Padmé as a young, proud queen, flowers were laid. Guards explained it was a sign of respect to her highness, but it felt more like a grave.

As the day came to a close, and their hopes of finding anything grew dimmer, they settled to finding food before resting in preparation for another day of searching.

A small bakery was decided on for dinner. It had the same portraits of Padmé outside, though much more well kept and pristine, with rows of red flowers positioned around her that would've made the vision beautiful if not for the sadness of the reality of it all.

"Welcome, welcome!" A plump woman from behind the counter greeted them with a wide smile and a chirpy voice as they entered the store. The entire place smelled of sweets and bread, and even Anakin, who'd lacked an appetite the entire trip so far, found his mouth watering. "What can I get you today?"

Ahsoka and Anakin went straight to examining the large case in front of them, filled with cakes and pastries, while Obi Wan asked a variety of questions about the more substantial menu items that hung on a board over the attendant lady's head.

"Five blossom bread? What's that?" Ahsoka asked, pointing to a certain pastry behind the glass case. The name shook Anakin from his trance staring at the other items, and for a moment he glanced towards it. Padmé had always used to make that for the two of them, and she promised it to the twins whenever she could get the ingredients to do so.

"Ah, yes!" The woman caught Ahsoka's comment before Anakin could reply, and waltzed over to the two. "Our royal consort's favorite! Two dozen of my very own batches have made it to her in just the last week."

“You bake goods for the empire?” Anakin’s mouth dropped a little at the mention of Padmé, but the woman barely seemed to notice, too proud of her own accomplishment.

“Not just the empire, for Amidala herself,” The lady boasted. “It’s only right, we were her favorite when she was in office as senator and queen as well. I even met her a few times, before the empire, of course.”

Her tone dropped at the end of her sentence, and her facade of happiness for the empire seemed weak. Most imperial sympathizers in Naboo were really only supportive of Padmé, and it seemed this woman was one of them.

“That’s quite impressive,” Obi Wan hummed, stroking his beard in a way that made it clear to both Anakin and Ahsoka that a plan had already formed in his mind.

It had taken weeks to line up the times perfectly. Mrs. Launim made deliveries to the empire on a weekly basis, but only ever so often would there be a big enough order for a large supply truck to be necessary. The usual extra supply storage on a shuttle could barely fit Ahsoka, let alone the rest of them, and so it was weeks until Anakin, Obi Wan, and Ahsoka found themselves cramped between stacks of bread and pastries.

It was a long journey, almost two days, but they’d planned up to a week’s minimum worth of ration bars and water. Still, Obi Wan found himself slapping away Ahsoka and Anakin’s hands from picking on the assortment of baked goods that surrounded them like some sick temptation trial the order had been known to put on years before Obi Wan became a youngling.

Anticipation and anxiety ate at them much more than their hunger, as the chances of being found and arrested were higher than they’d like to admit. But, with the high level security on the Death Star and the struggle to find its location in the first place, it seemed this was the only option. Rumors had circled back to them of the stress stormtroopers transferred from the battle station had faced in the last few weeks, apparently Vader had brought on a whole new slew of security measures since the return of his consort, all of which made it hell to go on and off the Death Star or even simply operate within it. When they did get on, they’d have to take extreme caution to avoid being caught, and that wouldn’t even be the hardest part.

Finding Padmé in a battle station with a population of over a million life forms, actually being able to contact her, and finally finding a way to get her out. That would be the hardest part. But Anakin couldn’t worry about it too much, it would do him no good. No, he’d just have to do what he always did, and hope for the best.

When Vader joined her again in their room, Padmé had changed into one of the new dresses that hung in her wardrobe, a white slip that clung to her frame with a lace trim. She looked stunning in it, so much so Vader’s only cohesive thought was of how much she deserved the nickname that she so despised coming from his vocoder.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” Padmé said and she lifted herself from her place perched at the end of the bed, and walked towards him with confident steps he didn’t know were

possible after her weeks of sickness.

“Have you?” Vader took her hand into his, noting her well manicured nails, no doubt done by one of the many droids she’d been given. Everything about her seemed delicate and screamed her status as the emperor’s wife, and the fact thrilled him. “You could’ve requested my presence earlier, my love. You must know I would’ve come running.”

“Maybe,” Padmé’s eyes flickered away from him. “But I didn’t want to bother you. You’ve spent the last few weeks constantly at my side.”

“How thoughtful,” He said as he watched a blush rise in her cheeks. He wished he could smile at her, like he had before. He couldn’t remember those times much, the only ones that stayed clear in his memory were after his fall to the dark side, but he could often feel her desire for his smile in her dreams and thoughts.

“Shall we go then?” Padmé asked finally, and he could only give a reluctant nod as she began to lead the way out, their arms looped.

Chapter 25

Everything about the death star was unsettling. Even those unaware of its power felt unnerved in the space station, and those who did found themselves either terrified or sadistically proud to be on such an impressive weapon. The shiny, black floors would reflect a distorted vision of any fearful face, but more commonly would show the expressionless masks of the troopers who marched through the building like ants in their hills.

The rest of the structure sported equally as terrifying architecture, with sharp corners and bright lights, and a total void of color that wasn't the new blood red tapestries that had been hung to celebrate the royal consort's arrival on the ship.

When Anakin, Ahsoka, and Obi Wan had finally managed to sneak out of the storage compartment and mind trick a few troopers out of their clunky suits, they took just a few moments to drink it all in. Anakin almost gagged at the large holoportrait of the Emperor and Padmé that projected against a wall in the main hanger. It seemed new, and underneath the picture a caption read,

“Celebrating the return of her majesty after a long and torturous battle with her captors, the cruel rebellion.”

He frowned at the bags under her eyes that had been covered up with makeup quite obviously not done by her own hand. Droids were never great at applying cosmetics, especially not the reprogrammed imperial droids Padmé had told him about. It showed in the picture, but despite that and her obvious distress, she still looked beautiful.

Anakin shook away his distraction, and gave a signal to his companions for them to follow him. He moved as he'd been trained as an imperial cadet all those months ago, and Obi Wan and Ahsoka seemed to pick up the mannerisms quite easily. They made their way through hallway after hallway, finally taking refuge in an empty storage closet.

“Do you have the data chip Artoo and I put together?” Anakin asked as soon as the three were alone. Ahsoka nodded, producing a small chip that could be plugged into an imperial port; a rare piece of machinery Anakin had spent hours rebuilding from a blueprint Artoo had found.

“You'll take that to the main control room and upload the information necessary,” Anakin told them, repeating the plan he was sure they all knew well enough already. “We're too far from any planets for an immediate threat. As soon as you have the information, alert the fleet. We'll only need a couple ships, nothing fancy. After this, we'll be on the run. But it should distract Vader long enough for the rebellion to find a more permanent solution.”

“How do you know those plans will be of any use?” Obi Wan asked, for the hundredth time since Anakin first suggested the plan a few days ago only hours after they'd gotten onto the cargo ship.

“Just a hunch,” Anakin shrugged, and Obi Wan just sighed. They both knew the reality of the situation was that none of them quite knew what they were doing. With the Jedi order

dissolved and Anakin still being Anakin, following him into these crazy plans was something Ahsoka and Obi Wan were beginning to realize had only been avoided by his commitment to the children. Now that there was more to be done, though, the spontaneous personality they'd thought they'd lost in the clone wars was making a comeback, and now no longer by the order. Obi Wan was sure it would give him a heart attack soon enough.

"Obi Wan, if you can't trust the chosen one, who can you trust?" Anakin smiled at his friend, and Obi Wan nodded reluctantly. With a pat on the the stiff armor, Anakin moved to exit the closet.

"How are you gonna find Padmé?" Ahsoka asked before he could leave, he looked back to her, putting his stormtrooper helmet back over his head. "We have no idea where she is, we never even discussed that part of the plan."

"I know where she is." Anakin assured her, before leaving the two.

"Padmé," Anakin breathed out in a relief so great it overtook him, the sight of her hitting him harder than it ever had before. She wore a white silk slip and a large fur coat, both of which dragged against the ground as she ran into his arms. He spoke into her hair, the thick locks muffling his voice just a bit, "I'm so glad you're okay."

"Okay might be a stretch," Padmé laughed weakly, though the offhand comment made his grip tighten. "I'm okay now that you're here, though."

Anakin pulled back just to smile at her, but was disappointed to see her face screamed of conflicted emotions.

"Are we leaving now?" She asked in a rush, her eyes flickering to the door.

"Don't you remember what I said to you? Though the force?" His eyebrows furrowed, and she nodded, though she seemed unsure. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Padmé spoke firmly, removing herself from his grasp in a way that made him feel as if he'd been wounded. "It's just... Must you face him in front of me?"

Anakin sighed, cupping her jaw with his hand in a comforting motion. "I wish you'd never have to see him again, really, but it is necessary. If we leave now we risk the chance of his outrage being directed on an innocent planet."

"Of course," Padmé agreed, though she still seemed unconvinced.

"Tell me," He reached out to touch the fine fur coat that hung from her shoulders, hoping to distract her from her obvious distress. "What's the occasion?"

"I have a date," She frowned, and Anakin quickly realized his mistake in the topic.

"Well, it'll have to be cancelled," He winked, hoping to cheer her up, but the joke only earned him the same fake smile he'd seen her sport on imperial propaganda time and time again.

"I'm afraid I'd rather see this one through," He watched as her gaze sunk from his eyes to his waist, to the weapon hanging on his belt. "He'll be taking me to his meditation chamber."

Anakin scoffed. He wondered what it took to convince the proud man to do such a thing, considering the punishments he'd administered at the request previously.

"Don't tell me you actually care to see him?" Anakin couldn't keep away the anger that was laced in his tone, and Padmé flinched at it.

"No, of course not!" She groaned, and before he could stop her, she ripped his lightsaber from its place on his belt. Anakin was quick to try and take it back, but found she was pointing it at him.

"What are you doing?" Anakin pleaded, bewildered, never having seen such a hasty move from his wife.

"I want to kill Vader," Padmé said, dropping her extended arm to her side once again, leaving the weapon vulnerable enough for Anakin to grab. She expected him to, maybe even wanted him to, but he didn't.

She waited for the verbal protest, for the shock and the refusal, but none of it came.

"Really?" Was all Anakin could say, to both of their surprise.

"Don't I deserve to?" Padmé asked, genuinely, not sure of the answer. "Don't I deserve revenge? Shouldn't I want it?"

"You deserve everything," Anakin said, stepping forward and taking the lightsaber from her. He fastened it on his belt, and she frowned. "If revenge is what you want, I'll be sure you get it."

Anakin bent down and reached into his boot, producing a dagger. What a Jedi would need with a dagger was lost to the both of them, but the markings on the fine piece of craftsmanship made the sentiment clear.

"This was in your apartment when Bail and Breha cleared it out," Anakin explained, handing her the shining piece of metal. With the weight of it in her hands, she could remember it well. A blaster would always do better, but unlike her Alderaanian friends, Padmé had always seen such a beauty in a fine weapon such as this. It was mostly for show, sure, but it still stayed on her bedside table, tucked away just in case.

"I never thought it would get any use," Padmé laughed, though the sound was weak and sad. "I considered bringing it to Mustafar, when Obi Wan told me of what you— of what Vader had done. I regret not bringing it, now."

"Well," Anakin smiled. "You have a second chance."

Padmé nodded, slipping the blade under her skirts.

Chapter 26

The room that held Vader's meditation chamber was a hole of darkness, only illuminated by the white light being emitted from the chamber itself, a few small lights that lay on the floor — reminding Padmé of the arrangements at Coruscanti bathing houses — and a large holoscreen that was currently glowing with the imperial emblem.

When they entered, Padmé could feel nothing but out of place. The feeling even overwhelmed her fear, which had previously been stabbing from the inside of her gut quite violently. One may think her white dress and fur coat only fit with the imperial color scheme, but the delicate elegance of it only contrasted with a place that felt so outwardly industrial. Vader didn't seem to notice one bit though, too preoccupied thinking about how her beauty may contrast his own deformities, rather than how their personalities always had.

"Come, sit," Vader gestured for her to enter the capsule. She complied, but felt almost blinded by the light on the inside. He was close to follow, taking a seat in the chair in the center.

"It's not very homey," Padmé joked with a smile, but Vader barely regarded her, immediately moving to seal the capsule.

Padmé took a breath as they were closed in, the blade against her thigh burning her with its coolness. Something within her forced her to look directly into Vader's lenses. In this lighting, she could easily see his eyes beneath the red tint.

"Are you sure about this?" He asked her for the millionth time, and she nodded firmly.

"I'm positive." Padmé assured him, and leaned a bit closer before adding, "I love you."

Vader didn't reply. Instead, he settled further into his own seat, pressing a few buttons on the arm rest. Padmé watched his eyes close.

From previously unseen latches, medical looking claws emerged from the roof of the chamber. Padmé gasped softly at the noise that started their movement, the sound eerily similar to the few she could remember surrounding her before she lost all memory of the birth of her children. She did her best to put the thought out of her mind though, any distraction could be fatal now.

The claws reached down and grasped Vader's helmet, prodding at the release mechanism to let it detach from the rest of his suit with a hiss. As the helmet rose, Vader's mechanical breathing was replaced with raspy breaths that sounded as if he was grasping onto life by his fingertips. Padmé flinched at the uncomfortable change at first, but soon settled into it, preferring it to the heavy, terrifying presence he'd had before. She had no trouble admitting to herself she preferred him this way.

From the look on Vader's face, his expectation of her reaction was perfectly clear. Even if he'd managed to hide his worry, she'd have known what he was thinking, but from the way

his eyes stayed tightly shut and his lips twisted into an uncomfortable pout, it felt more than obvious.

His scarred skin was less than pleasant, but Padmé found herself more upset by how painful it looked rather than how disgusted she assumed she was expected to feel.

The worst part of his appearance wasn't even this, though. Instead, it was how similar she found him to Anakin. Even the Vader she'd seen before his tragedy wasn't so similar to her husband. Now, though, she found she could see the resemblance. It wasn't in looks, really, it was in his expression. Scared of what she would think, say, wanting nothing more than to please her and be accepted by her. Anakin had looked at her in that way more than once, and while she had hated it, she found it to be the one thing that connected them.

When Anakin looked at her in this way, Padmé wanted to help him. She wanted to show him that he didn't need her acceptance, even though he had it wholeheartedly. She wanted to show him he didn't need anyone's acceptance. That if someone loved him or cared for him, their acceptance would be a given.

When Vader looked at her in this way, she thought him pathetic. Her immediate reaction wasn't so cruel, no, but as his sad face lasted for more than a moment and she allowed herself to think back to all that he'd done, she couldn't imagine how he'd ever cared about her acceptance; or cared about her at all, for that matter.

How could he act like a wounded puppy now, after doing nothing but abuse her? After spending all those years worried about looking like a monster, not giving a thought to whether or not he was acting like one. He didn't have the right to be upset.

"Oh, darling," Padmé moved towards him, leaning over him and wrapping her arms around his head in one fluid motion, so that his face was buried into her soft hair. She could feel as he sighed deeply against her, the motion making his entire body shudder.

"You're not disgusted?" Vader asked her, his voice weak and broken, but achingly similar to Anakin's. The sound reminded Padmé of the few times she'd taken care of her husband when he was sick, and she did her best to ignore the pain in her heart at the comparison.

"Of course not," She assured him, "You look exactly as you did the night we met."

Vader made no correction to her statement, and Padmé did her best to ignore the goosebumps raised on her skin as his hand wrapped around her waist, uncomfortably close to where the dagger was strapped to her thigh.

Worried he'd notice if they stayed this way any longer, Padmé moved to practically sit atop of him, using the brief movement of her leg to grab the dagger. It was heavy in her hands, and she became suddenly aware of how dead she was if he opened his eyes or it somehow slipped from her hands.

Her closeness shocked him, and she could feel as he gulped nervously. Anakin had told her before she left him, that the more she could get Vader wrapped in his own emotions, the less he'd be able to sense her intentions. It seemed like it was working.

"I've missed this," Padmé told him. His head stayed buried in her neck, protected from any attack she could possibly try.

“Me too,” Vader said into her hair. “But you know that.”

This time, she was the one to nod without any verbal response. Vader had always made it clear how he’d missed their intimacy, something Padmé could scoff at now, knowing they’d never even had any, but it terrified her too much to do so.

“Can I kiss you?” He asked after a few moments of silence. Padmé hesitated, there was nothing she wanted less than to kiss him, but she knew it would give her the access to slit his throat as she and Anakin had planned.

“Yes.” She answered, and when he didn’t move immediately, she choked out, “Please.”

With that, he was quick to act. The kiss almost took her by surprise, somehow. Despite years since her last kiss with him, she could recognize it almost immediately. It was as if he was trying to consume her very being, possess her entirely. Padmé hated it, and at the same time, it left her unable to think, unable to do anything but kiss back.

His scarred lips ought to have repelled some of its effectiveness, surely, but if anything they just added a unique draw. It was hypnotic, so much so it took all her effort as she shakily lifted her blade to his throat, putting just the slightest bit of pressure.

Vader didn’t notice immediately, and something told Padmé if it hadn’t been for their kiss he would’ve blocked the attack before she could even bring between them. When he did notice though, his reaction shocked her.

He was quick to wrap his hand around her own, lifting her hand above the two of them so her arm was completely outstretched, putting enough pressure on her hand to make her drop the blade. The clanking sound against the floor felt like slashes against her own throat. He pushed her away, but the choking feeling she expected never came.

Padmé’s eyes sunk to where her blade had been pressed against his throat. She had successfully made a cut, it seemed, but he was bleeding only lightly.

“You couldn’t kill me, my love,” Vader smiled at her, the expression uncharacteristically soft, but the intent more malicious than she’d ever seen him. His hand had slid to the back of her neck, pushing her face against his once again, so that their lips brushed against each other.

“Kiss me again,” He whispered, and it felt like an order rather than a request. “Kiss me again and we can forget about all of this.”

Padmé nodded, pushing herself against him fully. Now, when they kissed, she was the one to consume his very being. She meant it to be an act of defiance, even if it was small, but she could feel him smile into their kiss. It disgusted her.

She pressed closer to him, as close as she could possibly be. One hand wrapped around his neck while the other reached behind him, stretching out as far as it could go. Padmé could feel her fingertips brush against the button that would open the chamber, but she couldn’t quite press it.

Just as the frustration was beginning to get to her, though, Vader’s hand on her back gave a force push, smushing them together quite tightly, while also giving her the reach to push down on the button. With it, the chamber began to open.

The first thing Padm  saw beyond the blinding white lights was Anakin. His saber already ignited, and the look in his eyes so fierce it scared even her. She was suddenly aware of the way she was pressed against Vader, and her obvious failure to complete her task.

Before she could dwell on it too heavily, though, Vader had used the force to send her flying off of his lap, tumbling out of the chamber. As she hit the ground with a thud, she could hear the sound of a second saber igniting.

Chapter 27

Knocking could be heard in the distance.

First, it was her father, waking her up for her first day as an apprentice legislator. Padmé had only been seven then, and yet she'd already been brimming with political prowess, or so her father would brag at dinner parties. His smile as he told of her successes had never failed to brighten her. He hadn't been at either of her weddings, and though the first time had saddened her, she'd been more than thankful for his absence at the second.

The knocking couldn't be him though, could it? No, it would have to be Anakin, freshly knighted and standing outside her office, trying not to draw any attention to himself in the senate halls while he waited for her to let him in. Padmé remembered how happy she'd been to see him rid of that awful little ponytail, though she'd grown fond of the braid and was a bit sad to see it go. With his hair beginning to grow out, though, Anakin was more handsome than ever, and she began to think just maybe she'd made the right choice marrying a Jedi. It wasn't as if anyone was gonna try and hit on him.

He'd laughed when he told her that, and reminded her that she had done just that only months before, but she was much too happy to be in his arms to argue with him.

That memory was one of many that kept her company in the few darkest months after Padmé awoke on Mustafar. She'd been swinging in and out of consciousness, pumped full of drugs and feeling as if her whole world was a blurry image. The droids that rolled in and out of her room gave her no answers, and no sentient beings visited her while she was conscious. When he finally did come, she was too sedated to even put up a fight.

"Who are you?" Padmé had asked, hoping to exert some level of formality, but it came out shaky. She could remember no further than after Anakin had attacked her, but what she'd pieced together from the events prior to that left her in terror staring at the robotic looking man before her.

"That is a matter for later discussion," The man — at least Padmé thought he was a man — spoke in a deep, artificial tone.

"Can you at least tell me where I am, what's happened?" She pleaded, his stoic nature and the sedatives running through her system making it impossible for her to keep up her own cool facade. "I can barely remember past Chancellor Palpatine's speech—"

"Palpatine is dead, he's no threat to you now." The man cut her off, and she gulped. Palpatine was out of control, yes, but Padmé had imagined he'd be formally tried. Maybe he had been, maybe this mysterious figure spoke of execution, but something about him told her otherwise. His footsteps as he walked out of the room made the same noise as the knocking now.

But the knocking now was no man, even if it had been caused by one. The knocking was a throbbing, pounding on her head as Padmé tried to focus on the scene in front of her with half open eyes.

Anakin had never looked scarier, neither had Vader. It was clear to any onlooker that the two had no greater hate for anyone than they did for the other, and it was solidified by the heavy hits of their glowing blades.

With every step Anakin would take, Vader would take the perfect opposing step. They were an equal match, it seemed, too perfectly made for each other that Padmé wouldn't be surprised if they could go at this for hours.

The problem seemed to be Vader's respiratory system. What Padmé had assumed would be his downfall proved to be not as disastrous as she'd hoped. The bottom part of his mask had not been removed completely, and though it was still a bit of a struggle, Vader was a more than capable opponent.

Despite her blurry vision, Padmé also became aware of Anakin's eyes flickering to her every few moments. She desperately wished she could remind him of the importance of his focus, but she found herself too weak to even speak, like the air had been completely knocked out of her.

As she regained herself, the battle raged on without care for her state. The two had thrown the room into chaos, throwing items and even parts of Vader's chamber at each other in desperate attempts to knock each other off balance. Despite the less tactical approach of throwing things each other, the two also skillfully clashed their sabers, only having gotten a few direct hits each. Anakin's leg had been cut into, while Vader's pale and scared bicep had been revealed with a particularly ruthless swing.

Anakin was bleeding heavily, the wound too large to cauterize as lightsabers usually did, and the larger wet patch of blood on his pants grew, the larger the nervous lump in Padmé's throat grew as well.

The pain surging through his leg would've made him cry out any other time, but now he had no room for anguish. He could barely feel anything but the pain, the rage, and at the edge of his consciousness, fear. Fear of what would come of Padmé, who's injury had distracted him enough to allow for Vader's near fatal blow to his leg.

"It's hard to believe you're a Jedi, Anakin," Vader taunted him, his teeth bared and his face having the most color it probably had in years. "Do you even use the light side of the force anymore?"

"I'm not a Jedi, you took care to get rid of their kind," Vader only seemed pleased at the comment, pleased at Anakin's demeanor overall. It infuriated him.

He couldn't believe he was letting the Sith get in his head, when all he'd done for the last five years was prep against that. Anakin hated that Vader knew him so well, but what more could he expect from a clone of himself?

"All this for her," Vader scoffed, knowing just how to push Anakin's buttons. "And to think, we're just letting her die over there."

Before Anakin could realize his mistake, his gaze flickered over to Padmé, who looked — and, through the force, felt — as if she was fine. Weak, but fine, and seemingly regaining

consciousness. The distraction only lasted a fraction of a second, and yet it was enough for Vader to make his move, taking another hit at Anakin's leg and taking it clean off.

Now, unable to help it, Anakin screamed out, alerting Padmé to his distress. She moved her hands up to cover her mouth, knowing any sound would turn Vader's attention to her, but her husbands pain rang through her like her own. Anakin's saber dropped from his hands, clattering towards her as it flicked off.

"I always thought it'd be Obi Wan to take that revenge, but all in due time," Vader grinned, his saber pointed down at Anakin's limp form. "Everyone of your little friends will fall to me, eventually."

"Don't count on it," Anakin snarled, and Vader just shook his head. He almost had some pity for the man.

"I know you better than anyone else," Anakin could almost laugh at the claim, but the pain prevented any more than a sniff of amusement. "Maybe you can take some comfort in knowing Padmé won't be harmed. She won't remember you, of course, but she'll be alive."

Anakin could feel his gut drop at that. Wasn't it more punishment to her to wipe away her happiness, her memories of her children, than it would be to let her live without them? The soul didn't cooperate with the mind on matters like that, he knew; even if Padmé forgot her family, she would feel empty without them.

"As much as I'd like to kill her, I don't think I could bring myself to," Vader continued, his words ripping Anakin away from his thoughts with their pure and shameless cruelty. "I suppose you could only be improved on so much. She's the only weakness of yours I retained, and one I intend on keeping."

Anakin wanted nothing more than to hurt the man, if you could even call such a monster a man. Vader deserved to suffer.

As if on command, Anakin watched as his own blue blade drove itself through Vader's chest, and the Sith collapsed to the ground. Behind him was Padmé, her white knuckles clenched tightly around the hilt of his lightsaber, looking down at the body of the man she'd just killed with tears streaming down her face.